# One Flesh

Rosita Forbes

# ONE FLESH

*by*

ROSITA FORBES

*Being a Comedy with a Prologue*

*G. P. Putnam's Sons*

NEW YORK · 1930

ONE FLESH

Copyright, 1930
by
Rosita Forbes

Published, Fall, 1930
**First Edition**

All rights reserved. This book, or parts thereof, must not be reproduced in any form without permission.

Made in the United States of America

## AUTHOR'S PREFACE

NONE of the characters named in this story are drawn from life. Among the chorus, however, there are many real people who will derive, I hope, as much pleasure in recognising themselves and each other as I have done in writing about them.

ROSITA FORBES.

PART I.—THE ASCETIC
PART II.—THE WANTON
PART III.—THE ICONOCLAST

## DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

ZARA WINCOMBE

JANE, her sister.

{ The Family represented at different periods by:
MR. WINCOMBE, MRS. WINCOMBE,
ROBERT AND WILLIAM.

CHRISTOPHER-CARLYON HILARY, the husband of ZARA.

JOHN, the husband of JANE.

### CHORUS

(*In the order of their appearance*)

Cerberus
A Well-Known Woman
A Genius
A Faun
A Cricket Blue
A Jew
An Authoress
A Peer
An Explorer
An Interesting Woman
A Scientist
A British Officer
A Hungarian

# ONE FLESH

## PART ONE

## THE ASCETIC

# CHAPTER I

THE party belonged to the whole street. Half a dozen houses were obviously taking part in it. When intending guests told their taxi drivers, "I don't know exactly where it is, but try all round Smith Square," they were, without hesitation, dropped at one or other of the open doors, through which came the sound of young voices and the clatter of glasses and plates. Generally several young men, in variations of evening dress, leaned against the doorposts and blocked the narrow corridors beyond. They were, invariably, smoking and some of them balanced collections of food on knees crooked across the passage.

The party, obviously, had character. For one thing, there was no music and, in various strictly period rooms along the street, serious young men sat in front of the fire with drinks purloined from the house that originated the diversion, and argued about sex, politics and the inspiration of James Joyce, or it might be D. H. Lawrence.

A youth with a shock of bright-red hair and enormous horn spectacles, which gave him the air of a beneficent fox, acted as doorkeeper. "It's full in here," he advised newcomers. "You'd better try number seven or perhaps twelve. I saw a galaxy of drink going in that direction, and they've bagged the best of the sausages."

The less persistent obediently proceeded to No. 7 or perhaps 12, and were regaled with smoke, talk and many curiously coloured viands, but the determined edged their way past the flaming Cerberus, who in his spare moments edited a monthly to which Cabinet Ministers had been known to contribute. They found themselves in an eight-roomed house, of which every floor was an exact repetition of the one below. In each room there was a sofa laden with young men, cushions, and a girl or two. There was also an immense table with a regiment of bottles and a whole army corps of glasses resisting the offensive of cold meats and fruit. Nearly everybody was talking, not very loud but with extreme persistence, and most of the guests seemed to be enjoying themselves as they wandered from room to room, still talking and eating, but there were a few exceptions.

A Well-Known Woman, who always wore some shade of yellow to accentuate the autumn leaf effect of her eyes and hair, was wondering whether she ought to be there. As the successful wife of a rather less successful barrister, she rarely did things because she liked them, but because she was afraid of missing something, or of not being seen in what might turn out later to have been the right place. Her social sense was not quite as keen as she would have liked it to be, so she sometimes made mistakes, and then her beauty, always a little haggard, was apt to grow tight-lipped and puckered, but her spirit was undefeatable, because it recognised no substance but its own in a world reduced, by comparison, to shadows.

At the foot of the staircase which dived in ladder-

like flights between all sorts of trousers and a few just-beginning-to-be-long skirts, the Well-Known Woman found a friend.

"Zara!" she said in the tense, purposeful voice she kept for occasions. "What d'you think of this?"

The girl addressed was eating a quantity of different things off the same plate and talking simultaneously with a very fair and very blue-eyed boy who had just come back from walking about Africa and thought his travels merited capital letters.

"Think about what?" she asked, her mouth full, but her manner, as usual, detached.

"Come upstairs. I want to talk to you," returned the Well-Known Woman, and the girl, hypnotised by the other's strength of purpose, followed her, still holding her plate, but it was taken from her on the top landing.

"No missiles allowed in there," said the voice of Cerberus, who had temporarily deserted his post at the front door.

Zara followed primrose taffeta skirts into an attic, crowded with legs. At least, this was her first impression. Legs dangled from tables, were stretched out on the floor, hung over the arms of a sofa, drummed on the edges of bookshelves. Of course, there were bodies attached to them, but they were unimportant compared with the legs, which were active and strong and, when feminine, extraordinarily well-shaped and certain of themselves.

"Shut the door! Turn out the lights. He's just going to begin," came a chorus of voices and, before

Zara could find an empty yard of floor, the room was plunged into darkness.

She was pulled down because nobody wanted to be trodden on by three inch heels, and the Well-Known Woman was hastily provided with incense in the shape of a chair.

A shrill, sexless voice began talking outside and a quiver of expectation stirred the crowd.

"He's a genius," murmured an unknown in Zara's ear. "Lean against my shoulder. No—not his." In the darkness, the girl found an arm thrust around her, but it was quite impersonal and she appreciated its efficient support, while wondering vaguely what it was that irritated her. The door had opened and closed behind the voice, which, with nervous little sighs and fluttering, uncertain movements, indicated that a young English governess was going to bed in a hotel room in some dashing foreign city.

The delighted audience coached each other. "She's forgotten to lock the door. A man'll come in. *He* does the different voices too wonderfully. You'll hear the whole thing—*everything*, my dear."

The Genius was certainly realistic. The imaginary bed shook. The voice rose in shrill protest. A masculine grunt broke into a crescendo of sobs. It was impossible to believe there was only one actor in the room.

Zara stirred. It was brilliantly clever, and, of course, it was amusing, but there was, in her, the same faint revulsion as when in the darkness the arm which still held her had pulled her casually against the shoulder to which it was attached.

"I'm a prig," she told herself, conscious of an unpleasant mental isolation, which, because she was exaggeratedly sensitive, she hid under a series of suitable comments.

Her companions were ecstatic. A sigh came from the imaginary stage. A male voice murmured comfort. The door opened and shut with simulated caution. The little English governess uttered something so unexpected that the audience gasped. Suddenly the lights went up and the Genius, a good-looking boy with rumpled brown hair, was seen laughing at the conspirators who guarded the door against all assaults from the unsophisticated.

"Do another one. Let's have the wrong bathing cabin. Oh, you must go on. It's too marvellous . . ." clamoured the audience, and those who were least certain of their enjoyment made the most noise.

But before the lights could be extinguished, the Well-Known Woman was on her feet. Her expression was harried. A glance round the room had shown her quite clearly that she ought not to be there. No time must be lost in retrieving the mistake.

"Why don't you come with me?" she whispered to Zara. "I'll drop you in Buckingham Gate, or you might come home with me and have some coffee."

The girl extricated herself from the arm which would have detained her. It belonged to a Faun with dark eyes and a thin malicious mouth, whose hair was brushed back so smoothly that it looked like a cap of ebony, but its owner caught her ankle in strong, thin fingers. "I wanted to talk to you. Don't go."

Unable to move, aware of an element of the ridic-

ulous, Zara decided to smile. She watched the effect of that smile on the thin, queerly ascetic features the Faun turned up to her. Good bones, she thought, but cruel. All monks are cruel. It's a crucifixion, and then, as the fingers about her ankle relaxed, what nonsense, he's got nice hands, he must play, no good at games, the sort that thinks it's positively brutal to hit a ball, and she sighed, because the men who intrigued her were not really men at all. "Pekes by the Hearth," her sister called them, and when Zara retorted, "At least they've got brains and something to talk about," her sister, younger by four years, asserted with the air of a particularly wise cat licking its lips over cream, "Talking isn't absolutely essential even before marriage and, afterwards, it's a calamity."

The Well-Known Woman possessed a Packard with a specially built body, painted bright yellow. She would have preferred a Rolls, naturally. Still she did her best with the Packard, and, after all, the body *was* specially built. Into this she swept Zara and, at the last moment, her sister Jane, very bright of eye and very involved with a red-faced young man who wanted to come too.

"No, no, there really isn't room," said the Well-Known Woman, shutting the window though the November night was unusually mild, and, only in Victoria Street, remembered how very eligible he was. Her lips tightened. It had not been a successful evening.

"A good party," said Jane, unsmiling, but with an air of concentrated satisfaction.

"But there was nobody there," said her hostess in genuine surprise.

Zara spoke slowly. "I did enjoy it. It was very amusing, but all the time I felt I ought to be enjoying it more."

"You never drink enough," retorted Jane, and, after that, they all felt the party was buried.

## CHAPTER II

THE house in Buckingham Gate was no more than a slice of grimed red brick. Its neighbours protested against their Victorian ugliness with bay trees in tubs and yellow net curtains, but No. 107 had, apparently, lost hope of being anything but plain.

Inside, the rooms were large, dark and completely out of proportion. A highly polished wooden staircase, florescent with unnecessary carving, sprouted from a corner of the hall and scrambled aimlessly from one storey to another. Everything was heavily patterned, the wall paper, the carpet and the coverings of the solidly stuffed sofas and chairs.

The Wincombes had once possessed considerable property in Yorkshire, but, coming of Yeoman stock, which dated from the Doomsday Book and had never produced anything more famous than a herd of shorthorns, they had declined with the value of agricultural land. Zara and Jane's grandfather had lost so much of his fortune in speculation towards the end of his life, that he was obliged to mortgage the Yorkshire property. Zara's father sold it, after a heart-breaking ten years, during which, imbued with the Victorian passion for keeping up appearances, he struggled to reconcile an inelastic income with the rising cost of living.

John Wincombe had been informed before he left

Oxford that for him there was no further chance of a subsidised career. The expensive diplomatic avenues in which he had imagined that he would pleasantly and none too actively wander were closed, but this did not particularly affect him except that, half unconsciously, he cherished the idea of putting a son into the position to which he could himself no longer aspire.

In the days when a ripe Toryism was the hallmark of a gentleman, young Wincombe declared himself a radical and proved it in the eyes of Yorkshire by marrying the far too good-looking daughter of an unsuccessful stockbroker.

Mrs. Wincombe was a Roman Catholic with obvious Latin blood and a pride altogether out of keeping with the position to which it had pleased a Conservative deity to call her. She was temperamental and affectionate and possessed of great charm of manner.

If John had been able to keep the family property, he would have developed with the times and, as a Liberal landowner, he would have found a seat and possibly office under Lloyd George. As it was, the lack of success which attended his first political ventures, the retrenchment necessitated by a dwindling fortune on which his father-in-law's misguided optimism soon left a mark, the lack of mental contact between himself and his fellow radicals, who were unable to sympathise with his peculiar religious principles, produced a shy dissatisfied withdrawal which developed with the unproductive years into a definite inferiority complex.

With the sale of Wincombe, there was sufficient to establish the family in some less feudal county where liberalism was no longer at a discount, but John insisted on London. With memories of the Oxford Mission, in which he had been an ardent worker and which had given him perhaps the happiest months of his life, he visualised an existence sufficiently inconspicuous among the crowds of the metropolis to satisfy his curiously inverted vanity, and sufficiently full of semi-clerical activities to justify his fervour for the betterment, along scheduled lines, of his fellow creatures.

The war wrecked what remained of the family fortune, for Mr. Wincombe had invested in Russia.

Robert was the only one of the sons to cross the Channel and he passed a year in the trenches without damage to his body. His mind became pro-German because he liked being different from other people. This did not prevent his being mentioned in dispatches for gallantry rather than common sense.

In 1920, Robert satisfied the last, lingering ambition of his father by going into the diplomatic service. He was too erratic and too much influenced by the sometimes lazy, sometimes impetuous Latin strain within him to be a spectacular success, but he had a gift for English prose which satisfied departmental yearning for the only form of self-expression permitted to it. At the period during which Zara and Jane returned from infrequent parties to the mild depression of 107 Buckingham Gate, he was in the early thirties, unmarried and already a little grey.

The second brother, William, was so completely

English that he might have been a reincarnation of all the dead Wincombes who had never looked beyond the day's work and the evening's port. He earned a small salary in the London branch of a famous Yorkshire bank and contrived, by living at home, to keep a horse and hunt every Saturday with the Whaddon Chase.

Zara was three years younger than William, and she disagreed with him on all points which did not concern the stable.

Her advent into the world, which from her first conscious moment she found inadequate, was followed after another four years by that of Jane. The youngest of the Wincombes made up, in the opinion of devoted nurses, for the deficiencies of the other three. She was what is known in nurseries as "a character."

## CHAPTER III

As a child Zara was morbidly self-conscious and she lived in a world of imagination, which had no relation to fact. She invented extraordinary games for the enthrallment of cousins who came to stay and who were rather frightened of the tales she wanted them to credit.

"Of course, it's true," she insisted. "You've only got to believe it and then it *is* true. It *must* be." All secrets to her were terribly important and any careless revelation on the part of the few children in whom she confided hurt her as if it had been premeditated treachery. Doctors were often summoned to account for an anæmia due to a succession of exaggerated mental experiences, and they prescribed the usual tonics and soporifics without understanding that the spirit of the child was wearing out her body.

Zara had never known physical fear, but it is doubtful if there was a moment in her life when she was free from mental apprehension. She feared the thing that might never happen with an intensity only possible to a highly strung creature utterly incapable of expressing its own feelings. She was terrified of ghosts, of being inadequate, of hurting the people she loved, of losing their affection, of poverty, of being crippled, of age, of ill-luck and most of all of death.

single-handed, the flames. She was badly burned and, when mistresses leaned over her bed, soothing and praising her, she told them, "I did it because I wanted to get away."

Such statements, repeated and amplified, were attributed to shock and Zara achieved her ambition. At the end of the term she was told she would not return and the next one found her established at a Kensington day school.

During the following two years, she acquired a fund of heterogeneous information which remained somewhere in her mind so that later she was credited with an erudition which she did not possess.

Heaven knows where such voracious reading would have led, had she been allowed to continue it, but its first obvious fruits being a bewildered and resentful agnosticism, Mrs. Wincombe, whose Catholicism was simple, fervent and poetically illogical, sent her to Italy without consulting her husband to whom all Latins were questing beasts.

## CHAPTER IV

In Italy for the first time in her life, Zara could steep herself in beauty. It ran riot all round her, in the light and colour on the barren hills, in the shivering silver of the olives, in silhouettes of towers against the sunset, in the fierce reds and ambers of a prolific harvest, in the Arno's reflected gold, and all this under a sun which satisfied the craving of the girl's blood, still strongly tinctured with the Latin strain.

For her there was always a sharp division between the important things, spiritual or mental, which one could not share, and all the physical joys which one could offer, like wine, to anyone who was appreciative. Drunk with the indolent warmth of June, conscious of the sun on her skin, as if it were the hands of a lover, she would fling out her arms as if she would crush the whole gorgeous earth to her breast and cry that it was too beautiful, it hurt, she couldn't bear it.

It was in such a mood that Zara was kissed by Ettore Bianconcini. He was a well brought up young man who, when not with his regiment, rarely moved from the side of his small, birdlike, skilfully made-up mother. But, deceived by Zara's frankness, by her unabashed stare out of eyes which, according to her brothers, were a size and a half too large, and by a general impression that virgins did not exist in England, he intercepted the girl on one of her walks.

It was very hot and Zara, hatless, her arms and throat throbbing under the persistent love-making of the sun, was ready to meet him halfway.

Insects replete with pollen droned through the heavy air. Berries were ripe on the branches. The girl's skirt was stained with pomegranate juice, and her mouth, unpainted but deeply red, was open like the split halves of the fruit. Ettore, who was no taller than herself and hardly more muscular, caught her to him without preamble and kissed the mouth which he imagined experienced. It was purposeless and unresponsive as a child's, and for a moment his disappointment was sharp. Then the defenceless yielding of the body in his arms fired his senses. It was so slight that he could break it and a sudden impulse of cruelty made him take the girl's lips between his own and kiss her as if she had been his mistress.

He felt her quick reaction and tightened his arms, but Zara tore herself away. "That's the first time I've been kissed," she said, making no movement to arrange her hair or the crumpled orange handkerchief round her neck. "It's different to what I thought it would be." She shivered a little. "I don't like it." But in every vein of her body coursed wine instead of blood. The stimulus was so intense that it numbed the beating of her heart. She felt as if the solid matter of her bones and sinews were melting. "How odd," she said in a clear and controlled voice and proceeded to walk calmly down the hill, while something in her was so shaken that every pulse drummed an appeal to which she would not listen.

Ettore was forgotten and this young man, amazed and disconcerted, could only express his opinion of English girls in a series of unoriginal expletives.

It was not till she was eighteen that Zara returned to Buckingham Gate. To amuse Jane, she had acquired the habit of "writing pictures," so that there had been no break in the intimacy which had always existed between the two girls.

The younger had contrived that she should be sent to the best school in England, in pursuance of the easy social career on which she was already determined.

Jane at fourteen was much more capable of arranging her own and other people's lives, if she ever sufficiently troubled about anyone else, than Zara at any period of her career, but, when she returned from Italy, the older girl was comparatively contented. She had known moments of such intense joy that the memory of their sun-steeped beauty remained with her to counteract the depression produced by the drabness and overcrowded patterns of a house which had given up struggling for more than lukewarm water and tepid coffee after lunch. She had acquired a few shreds of philosophy from the perusal of Italian scientists less ruthless than the Germans, less morbid than the Russians or Danes. More important, she had learned to cultivate the habit of pigeonholing the emotions she did not at the moment require.

Unlike Jane, she could not tabulate the things she wanted and then set out, deliberately, to get them. Her attitude was of one standing at attention, fearful lest she should miss something intended for her notice.

## CHAPTER V

SHORTLY after her return Zara was asked to participate under the ægis of William, who approved of her seat on a horse and her untiring energy, in the joys of May Week at Cambridge.

During May Week, she discovered another kind of happiness, unconnected with colour or beauty in any form, but it drew on the same pagan wells in her so that she went about, head high, eyes blazing, intoxicated with the mastery of her own body and the pleasure it gave her dancing all through the night or lying on the cushions of a punt, boneless as a cat, limbs flung anywise, face buried in the flowers or the leaves which she insisted on picking. Her careless grace went to the heads of several undergraduates.

For once the English spring behaved as poets would have it, and the backwaters of the Cam, tunnelled under overhanging branches, were full of diffused green light which made everything unreal.

"I feel drowned," said Zara, as the punt, propelled by a Cricket Blue, slid under the arch of leaves. "It must be just like this after a shipwreck. One would know one was dead because everything would be green."

She would have followed her thoughts still further, but the man interrupted. He was going down at the end of the term and the regret of which he was already

conscious determined him to make the most of this last occasion of its kind. A flirtation was indicated, and, unlike Ettore, he understood the girl who flamed to renewed energy when most of the other dancers were painfully conscious of the dawn. They had talked sufficiently intimately for him to realise in her the absence of all mental scruples. To his mind, deliberately analytic, she was bound, one day, to "go off the rails," but, at the moment, with her brain a welter of conflicting impulses and her body responsive to each one of them in turn, she had the dangerous sweetness of unfermented wine.

For some time he had wanted to kiss her, but she would not help him to engineer opportunities, and he felt she was not the sort who could be satisfactorily embraced in semi-publicity between dances. He wanted more than that. He felt she was worth more. Hence the evening excursion which had needed a bit of arranging, for William was a conscientious chaperon, the more so because Zara had pleased and surprised him by her knack of interesting all sorts and conditions of men. Before her arrival, William had felt she might need explanation. He hadn't seen her since she returned from Italy and his last impression was of a vigorous and angular personality, all long, uncontrolled limbs, and straight hair that fell raggedly over surprising eyes. He was agreeably startled by the eminently presentable figure which outdistanced all its fellow passengers, coming down the platform between heads turned in obvious interest, with the eagerness of a child and the glad expectation of a young animal which has never known discipline.

The Cricket Blue was aware of this same interested expectation when, having tied up the punt, he strode carelessly along it and dropped into the stern.

"You might give me some of those cushions," he said, and, having arranged them, felt for his cigarette case. He knew he was going to kiss the girl. He knew she wanted to be kissed, but somehow it wasn't quite as simple as the general run of such occasions. He looked at her over the flame of a match and pity ruffled the tide of his egotism. By Jove, with that mouth she wouldn't have much of a chance. Her hair was burnished and close-fitting as a nun's coiffe. Her eyes were cool and still, very wide apart—the sort that held dreams, but that mouth—well, it was asking for it. The cigarette went hissing into the water, and, without much conscious volition on either side, Zara was in his arms. But this time she held back. A sudden memory of Ettore stiffened her lips, but the Cricket Blue was more intelligent than most of his generation. He kissed her gently, savouring the smoothness and warmth of her skin, and only when he felt her relax against his shoulder, sought her lips. For a moment they were no more than quiescent, and, like the Italian, he was disappointed, but he went on kissing her, a little amused at the lack of response, puzzled too because he felt in her the potentiality for emotion greater than his own.

A leaf dropped on to the girl's face and Zara flicked it away, opening her eyes as she did so and meeting those gazing down at her. It was the first time she had seen such an expression, and it stirred something beyond her control. The colour drained from

her face. She felt her heart labouring under the sudden tumult of her blood and, in another second, immersed in her own passion, entirely indifferent to the man who held her providing his strength were sufficiently insistent, she surrendered.

The Cricket Blue received one of the surprises of his well-ordered life. He confessed to himself afterwards that he was a bit shaken, but while Zara was in his arms, he knew nothing but the demand of the mouth he kissed and kissed again till his body was as limp as the one he held so close that he was scarcely conscious of it as a separate entity.

It was he who relaxed his hold, and still Zara did not move. The occasion obviously called for speech, but the man's lips were unexpectedly stiff. His tongue slipped across them furtively as he strove for words. None seemed particularly apposite. "I say—you know —" he began, and then, as the girl's heavy eyelids opened and showed bruised stains that looked as if they might have been made by the weight of lashes which had pressed into them, an inexplicable tenderness gripped him. "You are a most surprising person," he said and immediately Zara asked, "Why?"

"Well, I don't know. At first I thought you were cold and you're—" To himself he concluded "hot as hell," but he didn't finish the sentence aloud.

The girl shifted herself with a movement that had no effort in it and, her head on a yellow cushion, she looked up at him, her face very white, her body still yielding to the hands which asked no more of it.

"I don't think it's me at all, at least not the usual me," she said.

Her voice was completely flat and its childishness stirred the man to further compunction. He stooped till his lips could follow the line of brow where at the roots of the hair there was a faint powdering of gold.

"You're very sweet," he said thickly and then, the shock of her flesh and her desire sweeping through him, he caught her close again and this time he hurt her, kissing her savagely, trying to wring from her a protest, but she made no sound.

The shadows were lengthening, the tunnel held the mystery of emeralds, when the two dragged themselves back to a sense of time and place. Zara was unconscious of any enormity. She pushed away her hair with a careless hand, rubbing her forehead, and twisting herself up against the stern with a grace which had no thought in it.

The Cricket Blue was more deliberate in his actions. Whew, that was a near thing, ran his thoughts, and, as he noted the expressionless pallor of the girl's face, which looked as if she had been drugged, he braced himself against a danger of which he was fully aware.

"We must get back," he said clumsily, and Zara did not answer.

Her limbs were like lead. They did not seem to belong to her at all. Warmth and languor possessed her. She had neither power of resistance nor of conscious thought.

Feeling the need of hard physical labour, the man sent the boat flying up stream, bending over the oars, conscious of each clean, measured stroke.

"That's better," he said once, expressing satisfaction at his release from the thrall which had held him under

the green tunnel, and Zara roused herself to make a commonplace remark. But she got out of the boat in a dream, avoiding the hand held out to her. It seemed to her that somebody else walked back to the hotel, somebody captive and bound, who could not free herself from the insistent dominion of passion. When she reached her own room, she flung herself on the bed and, face buried in the pillow, gave way to the longings which shook and finally exhausted her.

There was a dance that night, and Zara went to it still under the spell of her imagination. She was very quiet, and the Cricket Blue, staring at her whenever he thought she wasn't looking, told himself angrily, "She's plain, absolutely plain. What on earth did I see in her?"

He avoided her till the supper dances had cleared the room. Then, unable to resist the clamour of his pulses, he went to her, and, in spite of her bewildered, "I'm terribly tired. I can't think why," made her dance till the music stopped. With the feel of her still in his arms, he took it for granted that she would come out with him. The victim of a mood in which, deliberately, he refused to consider anything but the possibilities of the moment, he suggested a walk. Whither it led, he did not care, but Zara protested. "No, I don't want to."

"Why not?" asked the Blue, who was, suddenly, less sure of himself than of what he wanted.

"Oh, I couldn't explain," said Zara wearily, and that was the end of it so far as this particular man was concerned.

There was a moment next day when, accidentally

alone with her, he kissed her more or less by force, found her heavy and cold, was unwillingly conscious that he had spoiled something significant, and, in blind revenge for he knew not what, tried to rouse her by brutality. Something in her responded and, for a moment, he had the peculiar sensation of holding a tempest unleashed in his arms, but the moment was artificial, and when footsteps warned them of an approaching audience, the breach was accomplished.

Zara said nothing at all and the Cricket Blue nothing that was pertinent, but, long after he left Cambridge, he remembered and was puzzled by the expression in the girl's eyes. "She was damned angry," he told himself, "but I'm hanged if I know why!"

## CHAPTER VI

Zara returned to London with the feeling that she needed a cold bath, lots of gruelling exercise and a hundred miles an hour wind. "I don't like dancing," she told Mrs. Wincombe, who believed her, but when she wrote it to Jane, that perspicacious flapper replied with the one word, "Rot."

Zara, however, was determined that there should be no repetition of the metamorphosis which had robbed her of individuality and purpose. As she was incapable of telling anyone about it, the hour under the beech trees assumed illogical proportions and formed the root of a new fear.

Zara, who had always been a mixture of childish self-confidence and exaggerated apprehensions, began for the first time to balance the two. She set no particular value on academic chastity. If it were a virtue at all, it was certainly a minor one, unimportant beside such vital qualities as generosity, tolerance, understanding and all the charitable kindnesses of experience, but she had a horror of half-measures. The ascetic in her was convinced that to harbour desire was no less degrading than to give way to it. In those days she wanted desperately to feel free, but her struggles in that direction were clogged by the unfocussed passion which reduced her to quivering sleepless flesh, the prey of a searing imagination.

Brooding over her impotence when attacked by this beast created out of unsatisfied sensuality, hollow-eyed, with premature shadows round her nostrils, she determined that she would have no more of it. Freedom was her god and freedom could only be won through the exploitation of her brain. Back to her books, went Zara.

Jane was the first to remonstrate with her on her indifference to the young men who began to come to the house.

"You're as out of date as the Dodo," fumed exceedingly wide-awake sixteen. "You're just hibernating and, if you aren't careful, you'll take to collars and pince-nez. What's the matter with you, going about with your head in the sand like an ostrich?"

"Nothing's the matter," retorted Zara, stung out of her usual detachment. "I don't particularly want to be kissed by every man I meet. That's all."

"H'm," interpolated her irreverent junior. "I should think that's just about what you *do* want."

The shot was so near the mark that Zara had no need to assume the indignation she expressed.

"You ghastly child—" she began in the most superior voice at her disposal, and was promptly cut short with—

"Don't pretend to be shocked. If you are, it's very good for you. Everyone should be shocked at least once a month."

Jane only stopped to gather breath for further attack.

"When are you going to get married? That'll cure you of your anti-kissing complex."

Zara gasped and, simultaneously, recovered her sense of humour. "Idiot," she remarked equably. "I haven't got one, but kissing is so purposeless. I do hate half-way houses."

Jane was interested. For a couple of years she had known all there was to be known, and her French was equal to her knowledge. She referred with acumen to the disposition of an "allumeuse" and then, reverting to her natural self, "but kisses don't mean anything at all."

"Have you tried?" asked Zara, surprised. Jane wouldn't answer. She returned to the subject of marriage.

"I'm not going to marry—ever," said her exasperated sister, and, making up her mind on the spur of the moment, "I'm going to work."

"What on earth for?" asked Jane, to whom it would never have occurred that it might be necessary to earn whatever she required.

"Money," retorted Zara, but she meant something quite different.

The Wincombe family were accustomed to financial worry. There was never enough money to go round, and in Mrs. Wincombe's mind was a great gulf fixed between the way things ought to be done and the way in which insufficient means obliged her to do them. In the Wincombe family it was tacitly acknowledged that lack of means prevented the carrying out of almost every natural project. It had stifled William's ambition to go into the Army. It hampered Robert at the Foreign Office. It limited Zara's social opportunities and caused her many misgivings as to her clothes. It

endowed the whole family with a facet of the paternal inferiority complex.

Jane was the exception, for she was the only individualist in a group subconsciously dominated by the father's point of view. In the matter of John's conscience too she was independent. After a year at school, her skirts went up to her knees. Her hair was cropped as close as a boy's and she bought the most provocative make-up she could find. Mr. Wincombe spiked her guns by failing to notice them, but one evening when, immersed in a detective story, she was sprawling on a sofa, he observed with a horror not consciously artificial, the whole of an admirably shaped knee.

Jane never knew what he said because she was fascinated by the tide of red mounting to his hair and by her own quick retort, on which she congratulated herself for days—"Father, you've got a sex complex."

Mr. Wincombe, feeling as if he were alone on the side of the angels, stammered something about "good men," leaving his daughter to infer that the sight of a knee, even one subdued by lisle thread, was too much for them.

"They can't be very good if they can't stand legs nowadays!" she said, somewhat incoherently because she saw in front of her St. Michael fighting devils of whose names and habits she was still sufficiently ignorant. Fascinated but not at all alarmed, she watched her father's rising passion and wondered how such a tide had gathered and what warped principles had dammed it from its natural course. "Father's not nor-

mal," she told Zara at a later date, but she never explained why.

It would have been better, perhaps, if she had, for Zara had no such intimate revelation of the nature she had inherited. Impatient of the perpetual restrictions of poverty, she believed, in common with her brothers and sister, that she would give anything for money, but not for a moment did that "anything" include herself. While Jane was determined, from the first moment she realised the importance of wealth, to secure it by marrying a rich man, for Zara the question was much more complicated.

In the older girl there was a streak of the idealism which prompted her father to spend his time and more money than he could afford in the cause of social reform. She wanted money as she wanted everything that extended the boundaries of life, but she could make no sacrifice for it and, in her moments of spiritual elation, when the idealist took charge, nothing material was of the slightest importance. It was this Zara of many facets, all of them a little worn by two years' struggle against the impulses which in her father had been perverted by fear and constraint, who determined to solve every problem at once by taking a job.

## CHAPTER VII

ZARA, who had a flair for expressing original opinions in few words, found work in a new advertising agency which prided itself on something it vaguely called "scope."

At first she was paid by the number of words ordered, and for a year she did no more than supplement a totally inadequate dress-allowance on which, to teach her the value of money, she paid taxation, but to be able to talk of "my office" gave her a feeling of anchorage. At the end of the year, she was admitted to a position on the staff and to the privilege of a desk in a lime-yellow cubby-hole. Saturday was the goal for which everyone worked, unless the possibility of a hundred thousand account threw Universal Ltd. into a state of excitement, and at twelve-fifty precisely on that morning the presiding deity's Rolls-Royce edged its way up the hairpin street. Once when it was raining Zara had been given a lift in it, and, to its owner's undisguised surprise, had accepted the attention with no more than a "Oh, thanks awfully. I am rather late."

Intrigued, the Jew said something about lunch, and the girl refused so casually that his interest was stimulated.

"A pleasure postponed," he insisted, and three days

later—the delay had been carefully calculated—he sent for Zara, nominally to discuss some copy.

The girl was not certain whether she was going to be praised or blamed and apprehension induced an uncomfortable sensibility somewhere in the region of the heart, but when she realised it was only a matter of lunching out, she recovered her detachment. The Jew had none of the outstanding features of his race. He was young, well-groomed and vigorous and, if a cigar had taken permanent root in one corner of his mouth, his eyes, brown as the best coffee and with the same clearness, were sufficiently expressive without the smile, half amused, half rueful, always experienced, which curled up the edges of the lips and suggested an unexpected and not althogether willing comprehension.

"I'd like it," said Zara briefly, and took it for granted that they would leave the building together. To avoid this, the Jew departed earlier than was convenient and sent a taxi for his guest. Lunch in the grill-room of the Ritz provided the host with a series of surprises. First of all, Zara refused all the expensive dishes he imagined would appeal to her.

"Food is rather a bore, don't you think," she said, and chose a mixed grill.

"What'll you drink?" asked a by this time quite amused young man, who had almost forgotten his wealth.

"Water," returned Zara. "I like the idea of cocktails, but not the taste."

The Jew seized the opportunity. He was quite willing to talk about Zara's ideas and, because he came of

a race which has always understood women, he was soon made privy to a number of them.

"You don't have to work?" he said, after an impression of 107 Buckingham Gate had made him laugh out loud.

"No, but I like it. I'm frightened of time, aren't you? There's such lots of it. It hems one in. One can't get through it."

Thereafter, they progressed towards friendship, which was not quite what the host had in mind when he issued his invitation.

Gauging the value of sincerity, he told Zara that she had upset most of his ideas and she replied, "You'd be wasted as anything but a friend. I've never met a Jew with whom I didn't want to be friends. You've a gift in that direction. I suppose it's because you talk so well, or have I been doing all the talking?"

Her host smiled. He had ceased to be Olympian. Zara might have been lunching in his mother's house in Lancaster Gate.

"Well, you've done your share and a bit more perhaps, except when we plunged into B.C." He referred to an interlude, to him amazing, when, hardly believing he was awake, he had found himself talking of Essenic Judaism to a girl who apparently knew something about it and certainly wished to know more.

"I'd like to say you must lunch with us, but everything's watered at home. I might collect Robert and we could go to that new Italian place. I wonder how you'd get on with Robert." Zara summed up her brother's intellectual detachment. He would appreciate the Jew's receptivity. Yes, it might be a success.

It was. Robert was in a mood when he wanted to talk. He had an idea for a play. In it a Man and his Brain were the protagonists. The former tried to live without the latter for six months and the result was, "I think we're both mad," said the Brain politely. "You get the idea?" Robert leaned forward, elbows on the table, his thin face creased into lines, the ornamental monocle used to emphasize a point. When he was not particularly interested, he was inaudible. Bored, he appeared to have an impediment in his speech. The Jew pigeonholed him from habit. "Bit of a genius. Screw loose somewhere. Jeopardising his career with that imaginative stuff. There's something in it. Fellow's got ideas—too many for the F. O. Cynicism a pose. He'll grow out of it, or rot."

Aloud, he said, "I'm a bit addicted to my brain, myself. It does me very well. I don't let go if I can help it."

Zara interposed. "It's the safest part of one, of course, but there are so many others."

"Let 'em loose," said Robert, regarding his sister with a speculative eye. "I wonder what you are really."

"Don't you know?"

"Of course not. One can't get away from the family aspect."

The Jew paused in the act of lighting a cigar. It was the only one in the small overcrowded room. "You could live by instinct for just about a week," he told Zara, "and then you'd sicken."

She looked at him expectantly, but Robert inter-

vened. "If the brain dictates, man becomes an automaton."

"Or a worshipper of Truth," said the Jew unexpectedly. They discussed truth with vigour and the argument lasted till Zara upset her coffee with the exasperated protest, "But there can't possibly be one truth. It's not only different for each of us, but it changes every day of the week. How can I, on Monday, know what truth will be on Thursday?"

"Hackneyed," said Robert, but the Jew understood.

"It doesn't much matter so long as the Thursday self refrains from judging the Monday one," he said.

A month later, he surprised himself and startled Zara out of her complacent friendliness by asking her to marry him.

"I'm a practising Jew and I'm proud of my religion and my people. I'm not going to pretend to be anything but what I am," he said. "I've made money and I shall make more. That's easy, and"—he paused—"it's important. The thing is you'd be safe with me. That isn't the sort of appeal one would make to most girls, but you know what I mean. Think it over. I don't want to hustle you."

It was several hours later that Zara noticed he had never said he loved her. She taxed him with the omission the next time she saw him and he turned on her with, "Was it necessary? I gave you credit for more understanding. What d'you think it will mean to my mother when I bring you to her? She has a right to expect a daughter of her own people, but she will say nothing."

Zara was quickly responsive. "I understand. It would be difficult for you."

She felt that, behind the modernity of the successful business man, was something primitive and brooding. All the people she knew were shallow-rooted. They covered a great deal of ground, spreading out in all directions just under the surface, but this man's roots went deep into the past.

Seated at a corner table in an underground grill-room with shaded electric lights emphasizing the animated groups around her, Zara felt she might have been outside a tent in the desert, beside her a man wrapped in a sheepskin mantle whose ample folds would cover them both. Inside the tent, under the shelter of that cloak, she would be safe, but, also, she would be a prisoner.

She tried to explain this and the Jew nodded. "So you regard home as a prison. I pity you, for you will go a long road and a rough one before you find out your mistake."

For an instant, the girl felt as if she had already heard such words and, struggling with an illogical depression, she asked, "D'you believe in pre-destination?"

"If I did, I should believe you were for me," said the young man, and Zara had to pinch herself to appreciate the fact that he *was* a young man, admirably turned out, shaved, brushed, and to all appearances, the last product of exigeant modernity. Here was no tribal elder, wise with the inherited lore of centuries, reproving hot-headed youth which would stumble blindly on a road barred by experience, but the son

of a successful financier who, having inherited wealth from a thrifty, patient, hard-working stock, was developing a new line of business with some originality and a concentrated attention to detail.

"Against all my instincts, against my conviction that the Jew ought to mate with his own people, I love you and that is, to my mind, the only reason for marriage. When I first asked you to lunch with me, I contemplated a little amusement. I'm not particularly avid of adventure, but you took myself and my car so much for granted that I judged you willing to accept anything that I offered. That mouth of yours, Zara, is a bad advertisement."

It was the first time he had used her name and the girl felt that, with it, he had breached one of her defences.

"Within five minutes I knew I was on the wrong tack. That's my job—sensing out lines of approach." He smiled straight at her with an appeal which held both humility and dignity. "You think dangerously and that interested me. Now I want you for myself and for my children, because I love you—there, I've told you twice in one breath. Are you satisfied? But I want you also because you've managed to rouse my sense of responsibility. It's deeply planted in us where women are concerned. We can't get rid of it. I want to look after you. Does that make you wince?"

Zara shook her head.

"I know the last thing you girls want is any suggestion of protection, but that's a new thing and our instinct concerning the women who belong to us is as old as our race."

"Belong?" queried the girl. "Is it possible for any one human being to belong to another?"

"Shibboleths again," smiled the Jew. "In pain and sorrow, in experience shared, in home and parenthood, in the fears and the hopes that go to make up marriage, how can two people not belong to each other?"

Zara looked at him in amazement. In her set, nobody ever dreamed of uttering such commonplaces, but the Jew was indifferent to her criticism.

"It's one thing to think dangerously—it gives you a sensation of freedom, I suppose—but I don't want you to live that way."

Zara, whose life for four years had been a blind effort to protect herself from the impulses she feared, voiced her uncertainty. "To accept anyone else's protection is an appalling sign of weakness."

"Nonsense," said the Jew. "None of us can get away from authority."

"Authority? Surely you don't imagine a husband has any authority?"

The man on the other side of the table smiled, but said nothing, and Zara knew that, if she married him, she would have to submit to an authority as assured as it was reasoned. The idea was novel and, to her surprise, it stirred her. She remembered the episode at Cambridge. The same desire to surrender quickened her pulses, but this time it came from the brain. Impulsively, she leaned across the table.

"I would so like to marry you, but I can't. It just is utterly impossible. I don't love you and, therefore,

I should fight you all the time. We'd be miserable and I should run away—I always do!"

The Jew's gravity was accentuated, and Zara's mind, rocketing here and there like a dragonfly at the mercy of the wind, registered the impression that none of the other men she knew could be grave. They might be pompous, or bored, or complacent. They might look tired or vacant, but gravity was beyond them. This man knew life and its values as she might never do. Was she a fool? Probably, but she couldn't marry him.

As they walked out of the grill-room, she remembered that the Jew had not questioned her decision. He accepted it and during the drive home he talked of international politics with an engaging lack of bias. On the doorstep, she asked him, "Do you really feel English?"

"Why?"

"Because you take such a broad view. I never know whether yours is a religion or a race."

"The one is rooted in the other. You cannot differentiate between them."

He rang the bell, and when, after a lengthy interval, the door was opened by a parlour-maid whose black looked rusty in the unshaded light, he contrived to imbue his handshake with an intimacy akin to possession. Zara had difficulty in meeting the shrewdness of his smile. Her own faded as she went up the stairs. They creaked and the carpet was worn at the edges of the steps.

## CHAPTER VIII

The Jew never repeated his proposal. There were moments when Zara was indignant because without difficulty and without consulting her he so arranged their relations outside the office that she was obliged to regard him as part of a familiar background. Surprisingly, Robert and he became friends. "That man's got the most comprehensive mind I know," said the intending dramatist, after they had talked through half the night, filling the shameless back room at Buckingham Gate with a haze of tobacco, punctuated by beer.

"By which you mean that he appreciates your ideas," retorted Zara, who had not been encouraged to sit up with them.

"I don't know about appreciating them, but there's nothing that fellow wouldn't understand. His mind's absolutely clear. There's no undergrowth in it."

At the first opportunity, Zara voiced her resentment. "Why are you taking on the whole family?"

The Jew answered seriously, "You like to think of yourself as completely detached, without beginning or end, but you can't get away from your family. It's no use kicking against the fact that you're part of it. It's made you whatever you are. It's responsible for you—does that get you?" The Jew's inherent gentleness was never without purpose.

"You've got responsibility on the brain," said Zara, hating to think of herself as no more than a branch of some deep-rooted family growth, but she went to Lancaster Gate and was introduced to the Matriarch, huge, fleshy, keen-eyed and rapier-tongued. She spent a week-end with Israel in an unpretentious country-house, simply comfortable and full of exceptionally beautiful things which gave the impression of having been chosen with understanding and arranged with reverence.

"You worship beauty," accused Zara, watching the Jew's hands on the curve of an ivory chalice.

"Man is apt to worship the thing he least understands," meditated the Jew. "But in this case it doesn't fit, for my people do understand and appreciate. I suppose we are hungry for beauty because, in essentials, it eludes us. We have none of the ordinary beauties in our lives, for we are exiles, denationalised without a country. We have no stake in the world, unless it be a financial one. Robbed of the common birthright, we are collectors of other people's heritage. We are not as a race creative, but we preserve all the beauty that you neglect or that you would destroy, for you are vandals at heart—you might as well confess it."

"What d'you mean by 'you'? You Gentiles, or you English?"

The Jew laughed. "That's pretty sharp. You have me cornered."

Eventually Zara was promoted to be head of what, to her secret annoyance, was called 'The Woman's

Side,' and wrote epics on the subject of face-creams or table glass.

In those years she made friends, business men and women with whom she came in contact, editors, writers and diplomatists, the young would-be intellectuals who were terribly afraid of being Kensingtonian and reluctantly aware that they were not of the reviled but sublimely unconscious Mayfair.

The Well-Known Woman wrote her memoirs and, being a little uncertain as to the extent of her public, though her unofficial publicity was all that untiring social activity and a succession of admirers from Fleet Street could make it, she came to Universal Ltd. for advice.

"I don't want to spend much on advertisement," she told Zara. "Everything is so terribly expensive nowadays, isn't it? But I thought you might give me a few hints."

The girl complied, with the result that she found herself lunching in the effective house which was almost in Belgrave Square but not quite. Thereafter, her acquaintance widened. The Well-Known Woman made a habit of girls if they were what she called interesting, with the proviso, of course, that they should be less good-looking than herself. They attracted the necessary men to her house-parties and, invited to call her by her Christian name, they were obliged to accept her as of their own generation. Besides, one never knew nowadays whom girls might marry.

To do her justice, it rather amused the Well-Known Woman, herself so successful that she had no

reason to grudge a moderate ration to others, to arrange unimpeachable marriages for her protégées. With this end in view she encouraged in his lymphatic pursuit of Zara a middle-aged and portly peer, so fatally reminiscent of every family butler that Jane irreverently nicknamed him, "Meringues, Miss?"

So we come to the night of the Westminster party at which the Genius acted one-man charades in the dark, and Jane told her sister she did not drink enough.

When the Well-Known Woman drove away in the Packard that ought to have been a Rolls, Zara stared after the tail-light and thought that the hum of Victoria was like a hive of monstrous bees. If the roof flew off under the pressure of gargantuan wings, the sky would be black with them, a fog of bees—a plague of bees.

Jane called to her from the hall, "What on earth are you dreaming about? Come in quick. I want to talk to you."

The note of insistent satisfaction brought Zara to earth. "What about?" she asked, following her sister up the stairs and resenting, as usual, the varnished balustrade.

"My marriage," retorted Jane.

"Is it imminent?"

"M'm. You can choose the bridesmaids' dresses."

"Jane! What have you done?"

By this time they had negotiated the darkness of the middle floors and reached their own landing where a sympathetic housemaid had left a nightlight burning. Jane opened her door and shivered as the November

atmosphere, stuffy, cold and drab, received her. "Ugh, why can't we have fires? I shall have two in every room when I marry John."

"John?"

"M'm! I've been horribly clever. I've persuaded the only really rich man I know that he can't live without me. So unusual in these days. Zara, he proposed quite beautifully—even Mother would have been satisfied—not in the least the spot-of-double-harness-sort-of-proposal, when one doesn't know if it's a new cocktail one is being offered or marriage."

Jane was excited. Colour blazed under her smooth sunburned skin which seemed to be no less golden than her hair and her tawny eyes. Her throat was incredibly long, and round as the proverbial column, but it had a suggestive yielding softness alien to marble. When she wore black, all this gold was startling. Even the unpoetic generation amidst which she lived thought confusedly of scent and wine and the heady sort of sunshine when they saw Jane in dark colours. They imagined the subtle moulding of lips and brow hid an equally intriguing temperament, but all of Jane was in her appearance. Behind it lay no more than common sense, perspicacity and a determination to get what she wanted.

Zara, standing beside the bedstead, from which the paint had peeled, felt colder than was warranted by the temperature of the room. She thought of John's five foot six of solid Scotch obstinacy. She remembered his stutter, his receding hair and the flush which reddened his whole face from temple to chin so that it looked like blotting-paper. He had rather a

nice smile, but his eyes were shrewd and calculating. If they mirrored anything of his mind—one could not possibly credit John with anything so elusive as a soul —it must be like a patchwork quilt, in which the pieces were very small and stitched together with meticulous neatness. Yes, that was it. John was neat and noticing. He would notice if he was being managed and he would resent it and his fat eyelids would tuck themselves in over the little shrewd eyes and the blank red face would absorb the smile that was its only redeeming feature.

"Well?" asked Jane sharply.

"D'you want money as much as all that?" returned Zara who nearly always voiced the thought uppermost in her mind.

"Yes, I do. You'd better get under the eiderdown. I've got to talk to you, so don't go to sleep."

Zara pulled the faded covering up to her chin. Three feathers oozed out of a hole and tickled her cheek. She felt this ought to be a great moment and curiosity bored into that portion of her body where mental emotions are magnified by physical reactions. She wanted to know if Jane were the least bit in love, but she did not ask.

"You can't expect everything from life," said a cool little voice. Jane was no cynic, but she was a realist, strictly bounded by probabilities.

"John knows everybody and he's got so much money that, even looking after it as he does, there must be leaks in his wife's direction. I understand him. He's not difficult to manage if you don't try and hurry

him, and we like the same things. Oh, Zara, think of the peace of mind of being rich!"

Her sister was trying to arrange the limpness of lilac sateen so that it covered both her feet and her shoulders. "This thing's underfed," she said, and Jane caught the simile.

"Exactly. Everything in this house *is,* and I am tired of it. We'll have a marvellous time, Zara."

She expatiated happily on the means which would be at her disposal and in which her sister would share, but when, pleasantly excited, she lost her usual consciousness of the difference between them and made plans for uniting Zara to a similar plutocrat, the older girl interrupted.

"Oh no, I am not going to marry for that sort of thing. It means nothing at all to me."

Jane was unreasonably startled because she was talking herself into the sort of mood when she had only to want a thing for it to become possible.

"What nonsense. You loathe all this as much as I do." She waved an arm round the slip of a bedroom, which rioted in conflicting colours, all of them faded.

"Yes, I do, but marriage is the most important thing in the world to me. I expect it's silly—everyone seems to make a mess of it, so there's no reason why I should be a spectacular success—"

"I should think you'd be positively shattering as a wife," interposed Jane, "unless of course the man happened to want a harem."

Zara smiled. It was obviously expected of her, but she was serious when, hesitating over words, she

argued, "But I'm hoping marriage will eliminate all but one ME."

Jane had one of her inspirations. "It will—temporarily," she agreed.

## CHAPTER IX

JANE was married in the following Spring. With the announcement of her engagement to a well-known racing man, the owner of a yacht and of two or three conveniently situated houses, where the cellar was adequate and the chef received the salary of a French marshal, she became a beauty. A cordon of photographers attended the wedding, to the delight of Mrs. Wincombe and the shame of her husband, who had done his conscientious best to prevent the marriage and heaved a sigh of qualified relief when he failed.

Remembering the houses so very conveniently situated within range of almost every social and sporting event, Jane's acquaintances vied with each other in sending tribute, which looked more expensive than it was, but the Jew presented her with a small crystal Buddha which had cost him three figures and considerable bargaining with a collector who loved its ancient simplicity. It was quite inconspicuous, tucked away among florescent silverware, but it was the only thing Zara coveted.

"Why didn't you give it to *me?*" she asked him.

"You have your own gods," he replied.

They were spending the week-end with an Authoress who had cottages all over the world and who collected people with the care that experts give to

specimen jade. Her métier was friendship and she excelled at it, so that the characters in her books, and the human beings who walked with her one by one, were equally real and equally important. She was lovely and ageless and delicate as a princess in miniature. She would certainly have found the pea under any number of mattresses. She had tiny hands, always cold, and her mind was amusingly experimental. When she invited Zara to stay with her, she told her: "A young man is coming. He's never been in love and I want you to alter all that. It would be so good for him."

Zara was interested. She travelled down with the Jew and the Well-Known Woman, who was disturbed because her maid had not packed a certain shawl which would be very effective against old panelling. Just as the train was starting a young man ran along the pavement, hatless, a strand of black hair falling across his eyes. It was the Faun. Zara had seen a good deal of him since the night of the Westminster party, and his peculiar blend of malice and asceticism appealed to her. His criticisms were feminine in their instinctive penetration and Zara had not thought of him as a man at all, till the Sunday when, having nothing to do, she went with him to an East End club and heard him preach a vigorous sermon on the text "Bear ye one another's burdens" to a crowd of roughs who, knowing him, listened appreciatively and without surprise.

Zara craned out of the carriage window, trying to attract the boy's attention, but he flung himself into a third class carriage without looking round.

The Jew bought magazines for everybody.

The girl wondered if it were the Faun whom she was supposed to make fall in love with her. How amused he would be. She would tell him at once. It would cement their amusing and entirely sexless friendship. His black eyes would twinkle till it seemed there was a star in each of them and his thin lips would disappear altogether, pulling in the cheeks so that there were great hollows above the jawbone. In the middle ages, he would have been an inquisitor.

Zara was so occupied with this thought, that she hardly realised they had arrived, and altogether failed to observe a tall pale young man lingering behind his hostess.

"Tea! Scones!" said the Authoress. "You must all eat a lot, because I don't know what my cook will do to you at dinner. I must hurry off—I left my characters in the most awful muddle—the heroine will keep on repenting and I can't stop her."

"What's she repenting of?" asked Zara, who was enthralled by the voice of the speaker. It was clear and low, and Zara, trying to describe it, said that each word was a jewel wrapped in velvet.

The Authoress looked shocked. Her little face contracted under its wimple of ash-gold hair.

"Adultery," she whispered, mimicking the awe of the surburban righteous among whom she lived for seven or eight hours each day, till her fingers grew cramped on the pen.

Zara could not resist the infectious mockery. "How terrible," she laughed. "D'you know much about it?" and, looking up, met the eyes of the tall young man

who, most fittingly, stood against a panel of tapestry.

The Authoress followed her glance. "You two haven't been introduced, have you? This is Mr. Hilary, Zara, but we call him Christopher-Carlyon—he seems to require two names—one would be totally inadequate."

The young man bowed. Full face he was very good-looking.

In a stage whisper, the Authoress, who was also, quite imperceptibly, for she considered it unimportant, a baroness in her own right, instructed Zara: "You will do your best, won't you? He's an anchorite."

With a quick, birdlike movement, she vacated her seat and, shepherding the rest of her guests towards a side-table where she suddenly remembered there were cocktails, she left the two whom she destined for a love affair, sufficiently alone.

Zara was not particularly adept at the intimate impertinencies which constituted the conversation of her contemporaries, and all she could find to say was, "If your name's Hilary, why do they call you Christopher-Carlyon?"

The young man sat down. He was tall and lean, not so slight as the Faun and without his pagan grace, but all his body fitted. There was no effort about it and no unnecessary joints. He wore a grey suit which merited the adjective beautiful, but Zara was relieved to see a darn near the knee. His blue tie matched his eyes. "But it's all my name—Christopher-Carlyon Hilary," he explained with a mixture of pride and apology.

"Oh?" said Zara, and because she liked to get to the bottom of things, she asked, "What do you do?"

The young man looked amused and mildly surprised.

"Nearly all the usual things, and I collect old glass as well."

"No, no. I mean—your work?"

"That's particularly dull. I labour in the family brewery for a pittance which won't even pay for one Waterford salt-cellar."

Zara gasped. "A brewery? I simply can't imagine you mixed up with hops. Surely it's very unsuitable?"

Christopher-Carlyon agreed. "Everything to do with one's family always is unsuitable, and mine particularly so."

They discussed their respective fathers.

"Mine imagines one can prosper on thin air or the smell of malt. He'd like me to live at home—that's in Kent—and trek up to Hounslow—that's the brewery—with the morning milk. I don't mind getting up early if I sleep out of doors, but that's not encouraged either."

The young man had excellent teeth and a smile which redeemed the weakness of pallid, indeterminate lips. He was amused and diffident and secretive, with a foundation of uncompromising pride. His imagination provided him with a series of worlds in which he could play any part he chose, so that the drabness of his actual rôle did not particularly affect him.

Zara was attracted at once by the impersonal quality of his friendliness. There was a familiar malice in his descriptions of people and events, but his shafts

were not barbed. Puzzled she said to him: "You're very like some one I know and yet not at all like—if you understand what I mean."

Christopher-Carlyon's eyes laughed at her while the rest of his face remained serious. "Perfectly. I saw you come in with my cousin."

So the Faun was his cousin, but they were not really alike. Christopher-Carlyon was obviously a dreamer swayed by emotions whose origin he least suspected, while, under a panther-like smoothness, his cousin was distinguished by the rapier quality of his mind, which feared neither originality nor imitation.

As if he knew that they were talking about him, the Faun joined them. "How d'you get on with the Head of the Family?" he asked, looking like a monk who knew and appreciated the evil he had chosen to renounce.

Christopher-Carlyon flushed and said nothing.

"Has he told you about Maurden yet?" continued the Faun, and Zara knew that he was being deliberately destructive. With his cloven hoofs, he was dancing on the substance of which the very best dreams are made.

She wanted to avert some sort of catastrophe so she asked quickly, "What or who is Maurden?"

"The Heritage of the Hilarys," replied the Faun in capitals. "I'm never invited beneath its ancestral chimney-pots, which I understand, strictly between you and me, are Victorian rather than Elizabethan."

"The place has been restored," said Christopher-Carlyon stiffly, and the Faun's black eyes registered satisfaction, for his shaft had found a target.

That evening, sitting next to her at dinner, he told Zara all about his cousin.

"Christopher's a little mad. He'll probably end up as a Trappist, only that would mean giving up Maurden."

"You speak as if the place owned him."

"It does."

In a guide-book voice he told her that since the 15th century, when an ancestor married its heiress, the Hilarys had owned the earliest red brick castle in the South of England. "There are only a few habitable rooms. The rest is a ruin and Christopher would like to restore it, brick by brick, with his own hands."

"Why doesn't he?"

"Ah, that's where my uncle comes in. He's some curmudgeon and a miser to boot. Nobody can screw a farthing out of him and he starves everyone on the place, adds up the grocer's book and quarrels over an extra spoonful of margarine."

Zara was interested. She began to understand why Christopher-Carlyon had found it necessary to create a personal and private world where no trespassers could jeopardise the serenity he craved.

The Faun went on talking about his uncle. "The old man was a bit of a beau in his day. If you met him now you'd probably fall for him. He's made a habit of skirts, and that's sickened Christopher. He married my Aunt because he thought she had money, and she married him because she'd heard about Maurden. Both were disappointed—there wasn't as much money as Uncle expected and the castle was a

ruin—so they've lived in Vitriolic acid for thirty years."

"Is Christopher-Carlyon the only child?"

The Faun nodded.

"Old Hilary is much too mean to encourage offspring, and he's pruned his solitary olive branch pretty thoroughly. It's no wonder Christopher's peculiar. If he had a brain it would be all right, but he's only got emotions."

"Why d'you go on saying he's peculiar?"

The Faun pursed his mouth till it was prim as a disappointed spinster's, but his eyes were wicked. "Well, you might fall in love with him." Then realising that his teasing had, quite likely, a surprising amount of truth in it, he went on more soberly. "You know, it's odd. I said that as a joke, but Christopher's just the sort of man for whom you might go over the deep end, and Zara, let me tell you, honestly, you'd get an awful crack on the head. There's about three inches' depth in that particular pool."

Zara laughed. "You are a goose and that grandmotherly pose doesn't suit you a bit."

"Do geese make good grandmothers?" hummed the Faun.

A sweet was being handed and he frowned it away because the cream looked like drowned flesh.

"Hadn't you better marry me?" he suggested.

"Why?" asked Zara.

"Well now, I call that a really intelligent question. Why should one marry anyone, but one does."

"You don't. At least you oughtn't to. If you do, you're mad."

"The Hilarys seem to have that privilege. However, to answer your question—d'you think I may smoke, oh, yes, her Liliputian Ladyship is doing it." He lit a Virginian cigarette and continued in the same breath: "Why should you marry me? Because it would be convenient. We could do a lot of awfully jolly things together."

"But we do a lot of awfully jolly things together now. Why get married?"

The Faun looked at her with comprehensive appreciation.

"Perhaps you're right," he acknowledged. "I rather wish I wanted to kiss you, but I don't."

"Have you ever wanted to kiss anyone?"

The Faun reflected.

"No, I don't think I have. I tried once with a woman who thought herself Pola Negri, and it was all very messy. It didn't come off at all. I don't know what she felt, but I couldn't get the crumples out of me till I'd sat up for two nights in a third class carriage talking to German students, and climbed half over the Tyrol without a collar."

Zara laughed with her head thrown back, and the Faun thought she was one of the very few people whose laughter expressed amusement

"You ran away?"

"Of course I did. In the small hours, as soon as I could extricate myself. Joseph had nothing on me for speed, but I took my coat with me."

Zara, thinking that her neighbour would never be

afraid to run away and wondering whether courage could go any further, remarked. "Yet you want to marry."

"Only you," said the Faun, with an understanding which struck the girl in some vital and unprotected place. Her face flamed and she would not meet his eyes.

"Why me?" she forced herself to ask, because she was never able to run away.

"Oh nun, live for ever!" mocked the Faun. "With me, you would scarcely dream of perambulators, would you?"

Zara's apprehension subsided, but, just as she thought she was safe, the Faun bent towards her so that his mouth was almost at her ear.

"Don't imagine that Christopher is any different," he said. "A nun might marry him, but not a woman who loved him."

## CHAPTER X

THE Authoress was an optimist and she was very wise as well as very clever. It was said of her that she was the wittiest talker in London, that her novels were literary achievements, that she was caustic and penetrating and mercilessly analytical, but of her friendships which she had garnered for so many years that they lay all around her like pot-pourri, the critics did not speak. Perhaps they were not sufficiently fortunate to be admitted to what the greatest living philosopher designated as "the catholic and universal worship." Be that as it may, the advent of the Authoress was always heralded by a chorus of pleased anticipation. "Oh how nice—that'll make the party perfect." "She's just what we wanted. How clever of you to get her." The chorus was unanimous.

Zara said "How nice!" at once, when the following afternoon her hostess suggested a walk. They went up a hill through aisles of trees. They walked slowly, because the little lady, wrapped in a cloak which accentuated her pallor and her shining hair so that she looked like a Rhinemaiden and Zara expected to hear the thunder of Valkyrie hoofs above the orchestra of wind and wood, liked to look about her and, as she said, "take in everything."

"Well, how are you getting on with Christopher-

Carlyon?" she asked, as they came out into a clearing sheeted with primroses.

"Very well, but he'll never fall in love with me."

"Oh, but he must! I'd planned it all. You mustn't disappoint me." And the Authoress opened wide expectant eyes as if she had been a child.

Beside her Zara felt like an overgrown colt, all limbs and loose ends.

"Why d'you want him to fall in love? Wouldn't it spoil him altogether?"

She looked down between the columns of the pines. The water was cloth of silver in the distance.

"There's something rather Lohengrinish about him and Lohengrin fussed and hot under the collar would be an awful anti-climax."

The Authoress laughed. "Don't spoil my pleasure," she begged. "Every man should dabble in love and, as for Lohengrin, he was an exceedingly unsympathetic person who knew nothing at all about women."

"Nor does your Christopher-Carlyon. He would give one an orchid wrapped in moonshine when one was starving for sausages and mash."

The Authoress, who was a very great lady, with a personality which automatically reduced anyone over five foot two to the position of stage hands, reflected. "I can't imagine myself wanting sausages if I were in love."

Zara agreed. "You wouldn't. You're a hopeless romantic."

"And you?" retorted the little lady, stepping daintily. "A sentimentalist—no more."

They were silent for a full minute, but the

Authoress did not like silence. It was waste of time. There was so much to be said, to be discovered. She liked turning her friends inside out so that she could admire the lining.

"Have you ever been in love?" she asked, and Zara answered with truth. "No!"

"Then you're as bad as Christopher-Carlyon and, unlike him, you'll get it very badly. Probably it'll prove fatal."

"Yet you encourage me to risk infection."

The Authoress stopped abruptly.

"My dear child," she said, shocked. " I never for a moment suggested that you should fall in love with Christopher. That's not necessary."

Zara wondered if life could be thus arranged in a series of chapters with the guillotine, used in parliamentary sense, at the end of each. She knew that, for the Authoress, this particular chapter would close when the victim confessed to unusual pains in the region where his heart had hitherto sat with Simon Stylites, on the top of a column. But for herself? Christopher-Carlyon was different from anyone she had hitherto met.

When they returned to the house after a measured hour, they found a Rolls in front of the door. It looked caged, as if it hardly knew where to turn, or from where its next meal would come. There was something impish in the delight of the Authoress. "The plot thickens," she said, and added with delicious solemnity, "I do like triangles."

The next moment she was welcoming the Peer who ought to have been a Family Butler.

"How nice of you to come and see me, or is it possible that you knew Zara was here? Well, she is and you must stay the night, though where I don't know, unless you can sleep in that supercilious vehicle of yours."

She swept the newcomer into the hall, but, within a few moments, he had eluded her, blundering through her hospitality and her conversation as if he were a bumble bee extricating himself from a cobweb. Zara was cut off from the group assembling round the open fire. She was appropriated and enveloped in the atmosphere of beneficent admiration which particularly exasperated her. While she was struggling in a fog of compliments, she remembered that Christopher-Carlyon had not yet paid her one. Perhaps he did not admire her. Ruefully, she acknowledged that there was no reason why he should.

"And I'll drive you back after dinner to-morrow. We might have a little supper at the Café de Paris," concluded the Peer.

"Meringues," said Zara, without thinking.

The round face beamed. Its pleasure shone all over it, and was reflected in the flushed bald head, smooth as a billiard ball but not quite so red.

"Certainly, certainly—a dozen if you like," and Zara thought that if she became a Peeress, she would be a very plump one. All her life she would be overfed, for the Family Butler's plans were inevitably connected with food. Culinary masterpices would be thrust upon her. Whenever she was depressed, or thoughtful, she would be encouraged to a second helping. In the end she would waddle sorrowfully from

one treat to another, but could one be sad when one was permanently over-cherished? It would be like living in cotton-wool. One would be comatose as a Strasbourg goose. At this point Zara shivered and explained that she was not returning till Monday morning.

"The country air will do you good," said her admirer, and added with fond persistence, "I can easily wait."

Zara felt that unless she did something desperate, he would go on waiting indefinitely. She looked round the room. Christopher-Carlyon was watching her with obvious amusement, but he made no effort at rescue.

She taxed him later with his lack of enterprise, and he replied: "It was as good as a play. A new Andromeda chained with asparagus out-of-season, to a rock made of pâté de foie gras!"

He slipped away with a conspiratorial smile as the Peer bore down on them.

For Zara the evening was a disappointment. Shepherded onto a sofa by the single-minded determination of her suitor, she was obliged to listen to him while the others danced to a gramophone. The strains of "Weary River" drifted across an interminable exposition on Anglo-American banking relations. When the girl could stand it no longer, she pleaded premature exhaustion and, before the Peer could express his concern, she had crossed to the corner where her hostess was playing chess, and begun a rather hurried explanation which was, of course, unnecessary, for the Authoress never minded what

anyone did. They might stay up all night or never get up at all, providing they were happy.

At the foot of the staircase which branched into a gallery lit by candles, Christopher-Carlyon spoke over the girl's shoulder. "You haven't danced with me at all."

"Did you ask me?"

"You were so fully occupied."

A barrier fell. The two smiled into each other's eyes, but it was Zara who said: "Let's go for a walk to-morrow morning."

Christopher-Carlyon hated making plans. It gave him a feeling of being tied. Because he was never free from an irksome parental surveillance, because his practical horizon was limited by an inadequate salary and no allowance, because he knew that for five or six mornings out of every seven he must catch a certain train, he cherished his free moments as a prisoner the rays of sunlight which penetrate his cell. He would not mortgage them in advance. In order to foster the illusion that he could do what he liked, he made a habit of missing week-end trains and his friends thought it was a pose. They did not know that he was frightened of the cell walls, which he felt closing in on him.

He never accepted an invitation when it was given. Even if he knew he was disengaged, he always said, "I'll see. I'll let you know. I am not quite sure," so that not even his few intimates could feel certain that he wanted to be with them.

He was on the defensive against life. Because he was not sure that he would ever realise the illusion

he cherished, and wherein he was always a Bismarck, an Alexander, a President of the United States of Europe, or, when he was depressed, no more than a Tory Prime Minister, he professed an admiration for failure, provided it were on a sufficiently big scale. His favourite hero was the Napoleon of Saint Helena. He saw himself alone, betrayed and deserted, standing at the top of some imperial staircase, looking down on a mob howling for his blood. He frequented fortune-tellers and horoscopists and believed in their conflicting forecasts. He was diffident and shy among his equals, except when, at Maurden, the mantle of the past descended upon him and he became for a moment what he would like always to have been.

As a host he was charming, but he was probably happiest among the waifs and strays of many classes whom he helped as generously with the few pounds at his disposal as with his time and advice. He would go without lunch to feed a protégé, partly because it gave him intense pleasure to be the giver, rather than the recipient. His charity was boundless, but it was often illogical, because everything affected his sensibility to an equal extent. He could not differentiate between forms and degrees of suffering. His few friendships he cherished on separate altars and he would have made spectacular sacrifices for each one, but it would never have occurred to him to keep an appointment if any dramatic appeal were made to him for that particular hour.

He wanted to marry, but what woman would understand him and, if she did, would she be satisfied with what he could offer? Christopher-Carlyon imagined

himself a great lover, but he had had no experience, physical or spiritual, and he was honest enough to admit that, however much he cared for a woman, he would always love the sky and the night and the feeling of history and old, gorgeous stuffs whose colour conjured up a dead pageantry, anything that seemed to him vast and romantic, more than the human being who shared such of his life as he was able to reveal.

Consequently when he met Zara next morning, he pretended to have forgotten all about the projected walk. The girl was sufficiently intelligent to respect his guard, and eventually, as if it were quite a new conception, they started across the fields, Zara suitably clad in thick shoes and a mackintosh, for there was a strong wind which drove legions of clouds across the sky and gusts of rain into their faces, and Christopher shivering in London clothes.

"I don't really like getting wet," he confessed as they breasted the slope of the hill and the wind tore at his bare head.

"Why didn't you put on a mackintosh?"

"I forgot to bring it," he said, and his face looked sallow with stains under the eyes and at the corners of the mouth, over which a small, straight moustache affected to droop, though it was really quite short.

Zara was pitiless, because she believed in fresh air and exercise and cold baths—these combined with being kind and never hurting anyone, constituted her religion. Also, she wanted very much to know Christopher-Carlyon and she thought that in the open he might possibly discard some of his armour. He did, but not until the rain stopped and sunshine

smeared the fields with watery gold. Then he explained that he would like to live by himself on a South Sea Island where he need do nothing but swim and sleep and think and, of course, worship nature, but Zara, whose predilections were always for the savage and the untamed, noticed that his gods were those of Wordsworth who saw proof of a controlled purpose in the neatly bounded English forests, in the banked torrents and the curbed moorland. She wondered what Christopher-Carlyon would be like in Central Africa and sighed because, in all probability, she would never know if she would really enjoy the space, growth, heat and ferment as much as she imagined.

The man did not notice her preoccupation. He was happily embarked on a voyage into his own character. For the rest of the walk they talked about Christopher-Carlyon and, in Zara, there dawned the first maternal impulse.

Her earliest contacts with men had roused in her a primitive desire for force. She wanted to be taken, to be submerged, to be, of necessity, quiescent, and the passion so suggested was strong enough to frighten her into an asceticism as unnatural as it was sincere. To be safe from the tumult of the other people in her, the selves which clamoured for an orgy of sensation and which she kept in forced subservience by exhausting herself mentally and physically, she had made friends with the intellectuals who fed their brains at the expense of their unconsidered bodies, with the Well-Known Woman who thought sex as ugly as poverty and the lower middle classes, with the Jew

who saw himself as a thread in a universal tapestry, of which his family life, enduring from one century to another, was a component pattern, and now with Christopher-Carlyon, whose ignorance was a life-belt.

By the time they returned, late for the lunch which the Peer had insisted should be kept hot, himself superintending its installation on an electric heater, they were friends, if Aspasia and Savonarola could ever indulge in such a relationship! In any case they were both very pleased with themselves, the man because he felt he had talked well and the girl because she had made him do it.

But as a result of that walk Christopher caught 'flu and went to bed in a cousin's flat in Shepherd's Market, without telling anyone anything about it.

Zara, discovering his plight, induced the housemaid, who was an ally, to go and inquire. Had it been any of her other male friends, she would have marched into the sick-room and been as effective as the sufferer allowed, but she was afraid of impinging on Christopher-Carlyon's peculiar sense of fitness, or was it propriety?

The housemaid duly delivered medicine, a nose-spray and grapes, and it was only after a confidential conversation with the cousin's share of the communal valet belonging to the flats that Zara asked if she could visit the invalid.

"He says he hasn't shaved for three days, Miss," returned the domestic, "but I shouldn't worry about that, Miss. Somebody ought to see to him."

Tickled, Zara bought several spotted brown orchids, more expensive than she could afford, and took them

to Shepherd's Market. Christopher-Carlyon was like a distressed wax figure and he apologised feebly for his hirsute condition, which was not very marked.

"Don't worry," said Zara, "you still look like the last gasp of a distinguished race. I brought you the orchids, because I thought they'd match your complexion."

Christopher felt obliged to smile, but Zara, in yellow, looked so vividly alive that he cheered up. "Your health's aggressive—it's overdone," he said, "but it's rather nice in this room."

With some impatience, the girl realised he was referring to the effect of her clothing against the dark brown walls, lined with a few prints and a case of miniatures. "Things mean far too much to you," she said.

"They're so much more satisfactory than people," returned Christopher-Carlyon.

"I hate possessions," said Zara. "They're our gaolers. If we could get rid of them all, we'd be free," and, while she spoke, she knew that one part of her would wallow in rich beautiful things garnered slowly and laboriously from all over the earth.

Christopher-Carlyon did not appear to be listening. He was not interested in Zara's thoughts at the moment when she uttered them, though he kept them tucked away somewhere, to consider when he was alone.

"Why didn't you come before?" he asked. "When the man told me 'a lady' had called, I hoped so much it was you, and then the wretch said it was only a maid."

"How did he know?" asked Zara, remembering the housemaid's inherited hat.

"He didn't seem very certain at first, but I said to him, 'Well, is she the most beautiful thing you've ever seen in your life or is she not?' He said he didn't think she was so beautiful as all that and then, of course, I knew it couldn't be you."

It was in this manner that Christopher-Carlyon paid her his first compliment, and Zara was inordinately pleased.

## CHAPTER XI

CHRISTOPHER'S convalescence was delayed by the exigency of a mandarin duck. He had bought a pair of these birds just before he got 'flu and, on returning to Maurden, his first question was about their health. It appeared that they were building a nest and nothing would satisfy Christopher but that he should stand knee deep in water on a day when April was imitating her late departed predecessor, and assist the processes of Nature by constructing an elaborate shelter. The mandarin ducks accepted the attention without protest, but Christopher retired to bed again. He scribbled a note to Zara, which was supposed to express regret for the postponement of the dinner they had planned, but the ducks held first place in it. Christopher-Carlyon had no sense of proportion, but then neither had the gods of ancient Greece. A sense of proportion is a strictly mundane affair unknown to Olympus.

At Maurden, the man was perfectly happy so long as he was alone. He did not need companionship, because he peopled the castle with the hosts of his imagination. If his mother were bad-tempered, or his father more grudging and surly than usual, he retired to some chamber where the arras was peeling off the walls, and with needle and thread set about repairing it. His pockets bulged with emery paper, nails and

any tools that might come in handy. He rarely moved without a hammer, and his own room, in a tower, became a museum of all the bits and pieces he discovered. Details appealed to him. He was as happy hanging a frayed and tasselled bell-rope that had once depended from the standard of his house, as he would have been watching the complete restoration of its walls.

When his return to London was precipitated by his cousin offering him the loan of the flat in Shepherd's Market, the first thing he did was to spend a week's income on a Spanish cope whose scarlet and gold effectively relieved the dimness of the panelled sitting-room.

After he had hung it on the wall facing the window, he telephoned to Zara: "You must come and see my cope. It's the most beautiful thing you've ever set eyes on . . ." And this was the first intimation she had that Christopher-Carlyon was in town.

Irritated, but realising that such irritation was illogical for it was his complete detachment from the grown-up, responsible world which attracted her, Zara said she was "frightfully busy at the office," and relented when she heard the disappointment in his voice. "All right, I'll come and see it," she said.

"Could you dine?" asked Christopher diffidently. "Would it be all right?"

"Why not?" laughed Zara. "Order an omelette, and after we've eaten it, we'll go to a film."

Just as she was ringing off, the man asked, "What are you going to wear?"

Zara had a new dress. It was the colour and weight

of molten gold and she didn't particularly approve of it. However, Christopher liked to see everyone's head turn when he came into a restaurant. He was unhappy if the head-waiter failed to recognise him. The golden dress ought to create the sort of stir he appreciated. She would wear it, and she told him: "It's staggering and quite unsuitable for a film."

At the last moment, because she had inherited her mother's sense of fitness, she felt there was altogether too much gold, and it was in black chiffon patterned with Chinese flowers that she appeared on Christopher's staircase. He met her in the middle of a flight, and he held a hydra-headed orange orchid, carelessly, as if it didn't matter at all. His face was lit with expectation, but it fell when he saw Zara.

"Oh, why didn't you put on the gold dress?"

"I decided it was crude. Oh! and you got that orchid specially for it."

She took it from him and ran up the rest of the stairs, but it didn't go at all with the stiff little Chinese bouquets. Standing in front of a Chippendale mirror, both of them had to acknowledge it.

"I *am* so sorry," said Zara, feeling as if she had hurt a child. "What shall I do? Shall I go back and change?"

"Of course not," said Christopher-Carlyon. "It doesn't matter," and in the same breath he explained how much it did. "I'd been seeing you in gold and I planned the whole evening to go with it. I've got to change all my ideas."

Zara was crushed. She wanted to touch him, to comfort him by the contact of her fingers on his arm,

but she felt that he would resent them. When he shook hands, he did it from an appreciable distance. With him there was none of the casual familiarity which characterised the relationships of his generation. Zara, looking at the admirably shaped hands twisting the orchid, felt that they could offer service in the name of love, as a priest offers incense on an altar, but never the intimate pain and pleasure of love. At the same time, while she wondered what sort of a lover Christopher-Carlyon would make, her brain registered the fact that she must always appear to him as he imagined her to be. It was not herself that he liked, but her power of illustrating his dreams.

The cope re-united them, for it was a gorgeous thing, and Christopher was pleased when Zara suggested that it looked like the blood of the Inquisition staining his walls.

But during the first part of the evening there was something missing. Christopher had studied every detail. There were roses in a Waterford bowl and a special goblet from which Zara was to drink. He made the coffee himself and wanted his guest to try some very old brandy with it. He talked about his glass and his miniature of the boy Napoleon, and about the mandarin ducks, but Zara felt that, though he was making a great effort to enjoy himself as much as he had expected, he was conscious of anti-climax. How could a dress matter so much?

Before they left the flat, Zara insisted on putting the orchid into water, Christopher, of course, protesting that it wasn't worth while, and that he would get her another to-morrow. Zara, knowing that he

couldn't afford the first one and that only Solomon's could have produced it, was remorseful till the organ at the Empire wrapped her in the glutinous sweetness of Puccini. Christopher was moved by music to the extent of being completely drained of individuality. He became an instrument on which each note was played, each theme developed, so that Zara, herself responsive to the drama of music, looked at the drawn face beside her and wondered whether it was good for anyone to feel so much indirect emotion.

The film was well-acted and the star sufficiently attractive to convince Christopher that she really was "*the* most beautiful thing he ever set eyes on." Consequently his good humour was entirely restored by the time they left the building. He even took Zara's arm to guide her across the street, and there was only a moment's depression when the waiter at the Hungaria did not know which was his favourite table.

Fortunately it was unoccupied and the rest of the evening was a success. When Christopher realised that the girl was an almost perfect dancer and the hand he held as if it were a specimen of glass was exceptionally beautiful, he thawed sufficiently to tell her that her dress really was quite pretty. The girl sighed her relief and knew how ridiculous it was to feel it, but she was quite absurdly happy, even when Christopher stood still in the middle of the floor and almost shook her, saying with an emphasis which suggested ferocity, "I don't believe you're thinking of the music at all! Can't you give way to it—lose yourself in it?" Zara said nothing because she was thinking of her partner rather than the music. She

had never danced with anyone so passionless. Christopher was like someone moving in a spell and, when the music stopped, his face was blank as if he had just woken from a dream.

In the taxi going home Zara wondered, without passion, whether he would kiss her, and was amused and curiously reassured when she realised that he had no intention of doing so. He said good-night on the doorstep without reference to any further meeting, and it was she who telephoned next morning to ask if she could fetch the orchid. "I'll bring it round," he said, but she couldn't tell whether he were pleased or not.

That summer they drifted into friendship. The cousin showed no signs of returning from the Rhone Valley where he was supposed to be writing a book, and Christopher was left in undisputed possession of the flat. With such a retreat assured to him, he became a trifle more adventurous in his relationships. It was as if an engaging and whimsical tortoise put his head out of his shell in order to preen the limited amount of self it was possible for him to reveal, knowing that if the sun proved too strong, he could retire at a moment's notice.

Against Zara's wishes, Christopher-Carlyon made the acquaintance of 107 Buckingham Gate. Mr. Wincombe thought he was harmless and his wife liked him very much. "He is really quite nice and so good-looking," she told Zara in a surprised voice for, by this time, she had learned that no obvious advantages must be expected in her daughter's friends.

Robert considered Christopher-Carlyon negligible,

because he couldn't "get the hang of his own mind," which was like a maze in which the owner wandered, lost and disconsolate. Robert went down to Maurden, but his interest was short-lived. The castle was sufficiently effective for a drop-scene, but it was no background for the shifting range of his ideas. The mind of the Foreign Office clerk was a probe. He enjoyed his intellectual operations for the sake of the unexpected material they might reveal, and he soon discovered that the mental tissues compressed behind the mask which Christopher-Carlyon was in process of perfecting, were auto-suggestive. "The fellow's a positive lens, photographing his own emotions one on top of another," he told Zara who came, reluctantly, to Maurden, for she was not at all certain that she could live up to Christopher's conception of the place.

Fortunately, as soon as she saw the central tower flanked by walls which the centuries had painted to Rembrandtesque reds and golds, she succumbed to its charm. The slots that had once held the drawbridge provided her with habiliments of the past in which to caparison the present. She liked the humble grass-grown path which slipped uncertainly across a trio of arches, the last one underpinned with ordinary fencing timber, till it regained assurance under the great door; but she agreed with her brother that the place was bad for Christopher-Carlyon.

It seemed to Robert, who was amused by the fancy, that Christopher was an emanation of the historical material which had gone into the building of Maurden. With a brown pigeon sitting on his shoulder, he wandered about the ruins, entranced by the beauty of

the carving in what had once been the banqueting hall, or the mystery of some newly discovered vault.

"I didn't believe in vampires, till I came here," said Robert to his sister, "but this place is fairly sucking the lad's brain."

Zara became pedantic. "I wonder if these old places have a conscious life of their own, drawn from all the tides of life which have risen and ebbed within their walls. If so, it would be of a vampire quality and it would vary according to the amount of strength supplied, more or less consciously, by ministering humans. If Christopher-Carlyon is a victim, he is a willing one."

"More of an acolyte, I should say." Robert was comfortably established in a camp-chair at the end of the yew-walk.

Zara sat on a step of the sundial and, when her brother expressed his conviction that 1929 should not steep itself in the miasma of less productive centuries, nor spend itself on their reconstruction, she said nothing.

Robert was surprised, for hitherto Zara had kept pace with his most fantastic essays into 2029. The future had always interested them far more than the past. He looked at her with eyes which were shrewd beneath the lazy cynicism, cultivated by the junior departments of the Foreign Office as the surest road to an Embassy. "Are you thinking of taking a hand in all this?" he asked.

Zara did not affect surprise. "I can't imagine Christopher inviting me, or anyone else, to marry him. I should have to put the idea into his head,

remind him of it once a week, and, finally, I suppose, propose to him." She was serious and refused to share her brother's amusement. "I expect he'd forget he was going to be married, or deliberately discard the fact if it didn't fit in, just as he does with engagements. The ceremony would mean a great deal to him—I'm sure there would be lots of lilies—and the woman concerned in it would be a lay figure, probably chosen in artistic relation to the vestments!" At this point Zara was obliged to smile, but Robert wasn't playing any more. His length had lost its air of comfort and the meagre aspect of his bones was accentuated as he jerked himself upright.

"You've thought it all out," he said. "Surely you're not going to make such a fool of yourself—"

Zara was startled, and she thought at once of the Jew. Here was *the Family* concentrating in a verdict which would be unanimous, though each member would subscribe to it for a different reason. Mrs. Wincombe would feel, with entire justice, that Christopher would not look after her child. After struggling through so many draughty unscreened years with no other domestic prop than Sunday roast beef, she measured the quality of a husband by his power of standing between his wife and the pressure of harrying circumstance.

Mr. Wincombe would object to the marriage because Maurden would accentuate his inferiority complex and, for inverse reasons, because Christopher-Carlyon would never trouble to live within the bounds imposed by his lack of means. Mr. Wincombe had a horror of debt. In his mind, it ranked next to

adultery. In fact, it was as great a sin, but one which could be talked about.

William had already expressed his opinion of Christopher in half a dozen words. "The chap's not all there," and he added, "Put him on a horse and you'd soon see his form."

There remained only Jane who had spent the summer at all the obviously fashionable places, learning her part, as she wrote to Zara. At the present moment, she was being much photographed in pyjamas on the Lido. When she returned there would be explanations, the only ones of which Zara was frightened.

Robert, on his feet and leaning against the sundial, for his was the sort of figure which must always have support, moderated his English, but not his opinion. "What on earth would you get out of it?" he concluded, and Zara replied, "A measure of security. I'm tired of being tempestuous. I shouldn't be vamped by this place, I should just be overlaid."

Her smile was slow and immensely amused. It was not skin-deep, like the smiles of her contemporaries, an anxious contortion of the epidermis. It was a state of mirth or joy which changed her face and was subtly communicated to her body.

"Cheerful prospect!" ejaculated Robert, but he grinned until he remembered the detachment essential to his career.

"So peaceful," retorted Zara.

"You've said that several times lately. What's the matter?"

Zara could not explain the fear of the beast with which she had lived since Ettore kissed her on a hill

in Umbria. For years there had been no outbreak, but the violence was waiting deep within her. At any moment it might leap out and destroy the cool measured assurance she admired in others and diligently cultivated in herself. She must have power of choice and, if the beast conquered, she would have none.

"Christopher-Carlyon would be sufficient occupation for one lifetime, don't you think?"

"An unnecessary one," said Robert. "What would the fellow do with a wife?"

"That's just it," agreed Zara and, for a minute, because the sun was brilliant and Robert must at least be tinctured by the same bewildering blood, she let herself go. "I'm afraid of being a wife and more afraid of not being one. D'you understand at all?"

Her brother said he did. He spoke fluently of inhibitions. "If you chuck yourself away on Christopher-Carlyon, you might as well never have been born and you'll drive him mad—that is if you ever get near enough to him."

"I shan't," said Zara. "Nobody will. And aren't we a bit premature? The poor young man has shown no symptoms of love!"

And they both shared the same thought, for Christopher never would be in love with anyone and they knew it.

Some of this conversation Zara repeated to the object of it, as they walked across fields fringed with bracken, for there was no park. The castle kept its garden secret within the walls and, outside them,

woodland and rough grass stretched up to the surrounding downs.

Christopher-Carlyon's flannels were exaggeratedly shabby. He wore canvas shoes and his trousers were rolled up above the ankles. As he walked he talked about the house, and it seemed to the girl that he managed to ignore the very existence of his parents.

They were bound for a church built by one of his ancestors to commemorate the relief of the castle from some half-hearted attack, for Maurden dated from the years of plenty, when men began to think of convenience rather than defence.

Bare-headed, they walked through the village, which was thatched and charming, Christopher so eager to explain how there used to be a secret passage between the castle and a certain farm, that he progressed crabwise without looking where he was going. Once Zara caught his arm to keep him out of the ditch and noticed that he made no subconscious withdrawal. Her spirits rose. Perhaps he realised, at last, that he had no need to be on the defensive.

Christopher went on talking till they reached the door of the church. Zara was silent because she was interestedly wondering whether she were in love. A not unpleasant feeling of expectation surged through her. It was all very odd and not in the least what she had supposed. In front of the altar, Christopher-Carlyon said to her, "Would you like to be married here?"

Zara's heart shook. "Yes. Let's," she said deliberately.

## CHAPTER XII

CHRISTOPHER-CARLYON flushed. The red poured into his face as if it must break through the skin. Zara watched it, amazed. She wondered if they had all been mistaken. It looked as if the barriers, fortified by years of conscious asceticism, were crashing down beneath that tide of red. Christopher flung back his head and put both hands up to it as if he would hold his brain against attacking chaos. Zara imagined that, the next moment, he would crush her in his arms and she waited, hardly daring to breathe. So this was love and it was divorced from passion.

But the flush subsided, leaving Christopher-Carlyon's face pallid as a sheet of wax. His eyes were suffused and he looked at the girl beside him as a child who has wandered into a new place and isn't sure whether he likes it.

"I hardly know where I am," he said, but he took her hand and held it close. His fingers were cold.

For a moment there was an embarrassed silence. Then Christopher-Carlyon began to talk about his wedding. "There must be masses of flowers," he said. "The walls must be lined with them—I wish one could have a carpet of them too—think of walking on living scent! You must carry a sheaf of lilies and your train must be so long that it goes out of the door."

Zara managed to smile, but her heart was doing something uncomfortable.

All the way back across the fields, Christopher talked about the ceremony and an old, scarlet altar cloth he had bought in Spain. "It'll be a marvellous background for lilies," he said. "I must show it to you. I hid it, for fear Father should want to sell it."

His thoughts came tumbling out, one after another, but Zara felt that they were talking of somebody else's wedding. It couldn't possibly be their own. At the top of the hill she stopped to look at the castle.

"You must have the damask room—you know, the one with the Italian four-poster," said Christopher. He had already eliminated his parents.

Zara listened with a feeling as if something in her had been unjustifiably bruised. "Am I to take it that we are engaged?" she asked at last.

Christopher looked down at her with his attractive, but impersonal, smile. "Well, it's a natural preliminary to getting married, isn't it?"

Zara nodded, and the man put a hand under her elbow as they scrambled downwards, but he made no other sign that there was any change in their relations.

Two days passed and, except that Christopher-Carlyon made her privy to the intimate secrets of Maurden, as if he wished to share with her his most precious possessions, life progressed as if it held no prospect of marriage or any other human emotion.

The three of them travelled up to town together, and only Christopher minded the third-class carriage. Robert and Zara were sufficiently interested in the

herd to take every chance of studying it at close quarters, but Christopher-Carlyon was oppressed by the vicinity of a baby with a smudge on its nose and greasy fingers. When it left the carriage, his spirits rose and, as the train slid over the river, he recovered sufficiently to ask Zara with unusual eagerness, "When shall I see you again?"

"Whenever you like."

"What about to-morrow evening? Will you dine with me?"

The girl nodded, and Robert, irritated by her acquiescence, interposed with a "I want you to meet an editor fellow. He might be useful if you mean to write anything decent. I'd booked him for dinner to-morrow."

Zara had a vision of red hair, standing upright above horn spectacles and a face which looked as if Epstein had fingered and rejected it. "I'd like to meet him," she said. "But——"

Christopher-Carlyon interrupted. "Didn't you know we were engaged?" he said to Robert with his blandest smile, and it seemed to Zara that a child was delighted with the effect it had made on its elders.

Robert busied himself with an unnecessary eyeglass. "Am I supposed to congratulate you, or is it a bit early? I always feel the end of the honeymoon ought to be quite soon enough."

Christopher's squib had misfired.

Robert and Zara shared a taxi and, on their way to the Foreign Office, the former was so careful not to express the slightest disapproval that his sister's spirits sank.

"Don't say anything about it at home," she begged, and Robert smiled.

"That's up to you," he said. "I hanker after no housemaid's job."

"What d'you mean?"

"Making other people's beds," and the long, slightly concave figure disappeared into the tunnel which most suitably burrows through the waste spaces of our foreign policies.

At 107 Buckingham Gate, nothing seemed particularly real. There was no change in the effusive horticulture which sprawled over cretonnes and wall-papers and Zara felt there should have been a considerable one. For twenty-four hours she marked time. Then Christopher-Carlyon telephoned. He wanted to know if she had a photograph of herself.

"I'll bring one this evening," said Zara, pleased.

"Oh, but I want it at once. I've found such a lovely place for it, above that little Flemish oak bureau in the corner, and I shall have flowers in front of it always—Parrot tulips or something equally bright. I've bought a special vase—it's genuine—I nearly cut my finger on the base."

Zara interrupted. "It all sounds most decorative."

She imagined Christopher perfectly happy making still another altar, this time for the effigy of the woman he would marry, while the woman herself starved. The girl shrugged impatient shoulders. What right had she to object and, after all, could there be greater security than on an altar? But she was getting muddled. It wouldn't be she, Zara, terribly human and sensitive and ordinary, who would be

worshipped, but a theorem, construed out of Christopher's own needs and an expensive portrait carefully touched up by a Bond Street photographer.

Zara's heart quickened its pace as she climbed the staircase in Shepherd's Market. A great deal depended on the evening. She wore red and she looked arresting. Christopher-Carlyon had been leaning out of the window watching for her arrival. He hit his head on the sash as he withdrew from his conspicuous position, which might have been labelled "Lover awaiting his lady."

Disconcerted, he rushed to the Chippendale mirror, and was caught by Zara rearranging his already perfected appearance.

"How quick you've been!" he protested. "I wanted to come down to meet you," and, once again, the girl felt she had failed him by upsetting his plans.

She leaned towards him, offering both hands and Christopher, taking them, drew her across to the corner destined for her photograph. "Look—isn't that just the right place?" he asked, eagerly and Zara felt as if she were in a doll's-house, playing with life.

However, dinner was a great success, for the guest made a point of admiring each detail of the table decoration, down to the rat-tail spoon out of which she drank her soup. Christopher-Carlyon expanded because he was happy. He told Zara all about the year he had run away from home and worked as a Fleet Street messenger, then as a clerk. "I wanted to show my father I could earn my own living, but it was pretty awful. I never had enough to eat, because I couldn't resist buying flowers."

"Why did you give it up?" asked Zara, seeing him free of Maurden.

"Oh, it couldn't go on. Why, I used to sit on a bench with a crowd of messengers, most of them unwashed, at the end of some wretched little editor's bell. When I went into the office and saw the sort of creature from whom I had to take orders, I used to think, 'If only he knew who I am,' and I used to be tremendously distant, thinking how surprised he must be at my manner."

"I don't suppose he noticed it," said Zara and regretted at once, because it was like pricking a child's balloon.

"You bet he did," insisted Christopher-Carlyon, "and you should have seen my father's face, when I told him the sort of life I'd been leading. He couldn't believe I had it in me."

Zara meditated. "It must have been rather fun. I do wish I'd been a man." She naturally expected Christopher-Carlyon to ask her what she would have done, but he did not. He went on talking about his experiences while living on what he called his wits.

When they had finished their coffee, which was excellent, Zara pulled the solitary big chair in front of the fire which Christopher-Carlyon had lit because he liked the look of it and, when conversation became desultory, she suggested that the man should read to her.

Christopher-Carlyon hesitated. Then he produced the *Book of Oxford Verse,* and established himself on a stool covered with petit point. Zara found that they did not like the same poems, for Christopher's taste

ran to what his companion would have described as "Verdant eroticism." She was amazed, when leaping up with the enthusiasm he always displayed unless he was tired or depressed, he hunted for and finally discovered, pushed behind a half cut volume of Proust, the *Indian Love Lyrics*. He read one of them admirably, but Zara protested, "They are so frightfully badly written. They come to pieces like squashy fruit."

"I don't think that matters. It's the colour—listen to this description of rubies. Can't you see them dripping fire, blood-red and gigantic?"

Christopher-Carlyon had a passion for jewels. He would walk up Bond Street for the pleasure of staring into the jewellers' windows. The glitter of the stones hypnotised him. At a night-club, he would say to Zara: "There's a perfectly gorgeous woman sitting under the fifth light," and the girl surprised at the sight of a hard-faced *fille de joie,* would contradict. "She's not in the least beautiful."

"But look at her bracelets. Have you ever seen anything like them?" Christopher would insist. Jewels excited and thrilled him. He would have liked to feel them pouring through his fingers. He thought of them when he was alone, as Latins think of women, and he loved them with an intensity which shook and, at the same time, stimulated him. He would have been satisfied to keep the biggest diamond in the world in his pocket, so that he could look at it when he was alone.

"What would you like to do now?" he asked Zara, when he had told her how he had gone from one shop

to another, examining the solitaires he would like to be able to buy for an engagement ring.

"I think I would like to go home to bed," said Zara, for whom the evening had been puzzling and disappointing. "But first"—she made up her mind suddenly and, summoning all her courage, spoke quietly so that nothing in Christopher-Carlyon need be frightened—"first, I'd rather like to be kissed."

The man was on his feet and he turned to her with a sudden broken exclamation that had tenderness in it. Zara got up while he hesitated beside her and the next moment, he had kissed her gently on the cheek. The girl was so surprised that she laughed and Christopher-Carlyon drew back. But, by this time, Zara's sense of humour was in the ascendant.

"We are engaged, you know," she said, and went to him and pulled down his head so that she could kiss his mouth.

Then, at last, he put his arms round her, but, even when they closed and strained her, for a second, against a slenderness equal to her own, it was as if he held a shield rather than a woman.

Christopher-Carlyon's lips were cold and, if there was any passion in Zara's love for him, it was baffled by the quaint, uncertain kisses, which brushed her face, fugitive as the illusion by which they were inspired.

Released from the most unsatisfactory embrace she had ever experienced, the girl dropped into a chair and Christopher knelt beside her.

"I wonder if you will be disappointed in me," he said and upset the last of Zara's defences, for it was quite obvious that he was thinking of her and in so

doing, perhaps for the first time, rending the veils with which he had deliberately blinded himself.

"Supposing, after all, there is nothing in me," said Christopher-Carlyon, piling his illusions at her feet and waiting for her to trample on them.

"My dear, my dear, what can it matter—" stammered Zara, and she caught Christopher by the shoulders. In the carefully shaded red light, they clung together like children, frightened of themselves and of the future, staring into each other's eyes and finding comfort from each other's nearness.

## CHAPTER XIII

From Paris, Jane wrote that she was having "a Noah's Ark party" at the house so conveniently situated for the Cesarevitch. "You must come. I'll never forgive you if you don't. We'll be amused together and you simply must pretend to be awed—at ME—not at the animals—two-by-two."

Zara decided that Christopher would not shine at the Noah's Ark party, which was fortunate, because nothing on earth would have induced him to attend it. He didn't like staying in other people's houses. They were too public. There were always moments when he felt pilloried and his sole refuge was a bedroom in the bachelor's wing, where there were no fires.

In the train Zara, staring alternately at the pancake-flatness of Cambridgeshire and the equally inexpressive pages of a novel, wondered if her sister would get on with Christopher-Carlyon. Jane was sharp as a terrier after rats.

Packed into a limousine with several people whom she did not know, the girl reminded herself in the intervals of conversation, that this was Jane's car. The Personage-in-livery, who drove it by the flick of a finger on an ivory wheel, was Jane's servant. Zara smiled. It was so exactly what her sister had intended.

She was welcomed by Jane with an intimate

pleasure which convinced the older girl that the Jane she knew had not changed at all, even though the Jane she saw was astonishing.

Zara was too enthralled by people, whom she saw detached from their own conceptions of themselves, to be troubled by the crowd, some of whom she knew by sight. She retired contentedly to an arm-chair which gloated over her reception and emphasized its excessive quality by shuddering like a steamer whenever her cautious movements made a gale among its springs.

A young man was leaning against some piece of furniture which looked as if its sole mission was to support his elbow, and obviously amusing the woman who gazed up at him with a wide-eyed effect of naturalness.

She was an "Explorer" though she carefully cultivated the sort of appearance which made it difficult to believe she had ever left England. By means of this she had acquired a reputation for lying so consummate that it amounted to genius. But she was really a very ordinary person with a capacity for hard work and an indifference to all forms of discomfort which facilitated her pilgrimages in search of change and her more arduous ones in Fleet Street which had to pay for the others.

The papers and the men she met abroad insisted that she had charm but she herself was so doubtful of it that she overdid her manners and was, therefore, hopelessly out of fashion. She was in love with her own husband and she earned her own living, with considerable difficulty, because she could not concen-

trate on any particular line and whenever she was with one clearly defined group of individualists, she was conscious of inhibitions which made her feel she belonged to some other set equally antagonistic when she happened to be with them.

She was well-meaning and she did a certain amount of harm among patriots and revolutionaries—the terms are synonymous East of the Adriatic—in small countries with grievances. The whole-hearted way in which she championed their causes encouraged them to exaggerate their interest for Britannia, who long ago discarded helmet and shield in favour of the black bombazine upholstery of a housekeeper with no time for anything but domestic economy.

Zara watched her take off her hat with impatient fingers. Her forehead and chin raced backwards, the one into curly brown hair, the other into a throat clawed by time and the scar of an old bullet-wound. She was obviously tired and the noise irritated her, but she went on listening with a concentrated eagerness that was out-of-date. Zara felt that she was looking at an animal in a cage. It was doing its best, but it was afraid of forgetting its tricks. She thought, suddenly, that the Explorer might be quite nice in some sandy place, where there was nothing to bother her, no bills, telephones, or invitations, no conventions or habits or idols, no necessity for compromise, only thirst, storm and danger, but even Zara realized that these things were too big to worry about.

Jane came up to her. "What do you think of the animals?" she asked in an undertone.

"Are they your friends?" queried Zara.

"They're considering me. At present I'm only an appurtenance of John's."

Her husband, small, solid and purposeful, came across the room. He walked with feet wide apart, each one firmly planted, so that he had the air of a seal experimenting on dry land. It was obvious that he could not keep away from his wife. His eyes followed her and, whenever she paused long enough in one place, he stood beside her, not speaking very much, but watching her out of shrewd, tucked away little eyes, which had in them an unexpected kindliness. "Think she's looking well?" he asked Zara and smiled at her answer: "Immensely well and so imposing. She ought to be an advertisement for something expensive in Vogue. What have you done to her?"

John's smile crinkled his face into folds of red flannel. "She's done it herself. She doesn't need any help."

It was obvious that he was immensely proud of his wife.

"Come to my room, when I get rid of the throng," whispered Jane and, for half an hour before dinner, the sisters were alone in a room which seemed to Zara rather like a show-case. It was pannelled with satin and full of unnecessary extravagances. Jane answered the other's thoughts. "No, of course it isn't me and it's only temporary. The house is awful, but it's a paradise of plumbing. I'm not going to do things in a hurry. You see I don't know anything about decoration yet."

Jane disposed of herself on a sofa and something

in the way she moved made Zara ask, "Are you going to have a baby?"

Nothing could disturb "plain" Jane. "How sharp of you to guess. I loathe being fussed over."

"But it's tremendously exciting. Are you pleased?"

"John is."

"And you?"

"Well, I'm thorough. I like to do things properly and a son is so clearly indicated, isn't it?"

Zara studied her sister gravely. "You really are a remarkable creature, but it must be frightfully bad for you to be so successful."

Jane smiled. She had got nothing more than she intended. "On the contrary. I am rapidly mellowing. I am prepared now to understand any forms of idiocy which you may see fit to commit."

"And to approve them?"

Jane did not answer. She was satisfied with her own affairs, but she was by no means immersed in them. Consequently she was aware of change. Zara, balanced on a stool in front of the fire, was not sufficiently interested by her unusual surroundings. She was sitting quite still. Her restless hands hung by her sides and in their position there was something quiescent and defenceless.

"Tell me about it," said Jane suddenly.

"I intended to," returned Zara, conscious that there was to be no change in their relationship. They could still jump from one thought to another and it did not matter to whom the thoughts belonged. "I'm in love with a man of whom everyone will, quite

rightly, disapprove, for all the wrong reasons. I'm going to marry him and I really do doubt if we shall be happy except in spasms, but we shall, I think, be friends and, well, I can't help it. He's the part of me that I've always wanted to find."

Jane was tactful, but, at that moment, she couldn't help feeling that her tact lay about in chunks, waiting for someone to fall over it. "Go on," she ventured.

"I don't think I can. You know me and you'll have to fill in the gaps." There was silence.

Then she continued, "He's all that part of me which has been lonely since I lost the power of inventing things. Christopher companions the bits of me that I can't show, and, though I don't think he knows it at all, he does need me. Our imaginations are of the same calibre. We both make idols and they're so much more important to us than the state of the Stock Exchange or the Cesarevitch winner."

Zara breathed more freely. She felt the explanation was concluded.

"I don't know your Christopher, but I've heard about him." She mentioned the Well-Known Woman who had described the week-end on the river with diverting perspicacity.

"She wouldn't understand a bit," said Zara, and realised that all her life she would be saying this sort of thing with regard to Christopher-Carlyon. It didn't matter. They would make a house for themselves, wherein they would be safe. On the gate there would be a notice: "Trespassers will be prosecuted."

"D'you remember we used to talk about half

measures?" she said. "Neither of us had any use for them. Well, you've chosen all this—" she waved an arm at the elaborate room, "and you mean to stick to it, whatever happens. There must be moments when John's all wrong, but it's the life which matters and he's a bit of it."

Jane smiled at her sister and said nothing. John had qualities which she did not choose to discuss and the son was going to be great fun.

"Isn't Christopher a half measure? If you want to be a nun, why must you marry at all?" she asked when Zara seemed to need prompting.

"I want a friend."

"That is the one relationship which is generally obscured by marriage."

Zara was startled. "Aren't you and John by way of being friends?" she asked, for it was absurd to imagine that her sister could be in love with the little man whose collars supported a head several sizes too large.

"Not at all," said Jane. "We're allies and partners in any crime that happens to be convenient. We're fellow victims and enemies and sometimes lovers. We shall be, I hope, well-established habits, but we shall certainly not be friends. We know too much about each other."

Zara's expression was comical. "Christopher's different," she said and wondered if, in years to come, this explanation would become mechanical. "Don't you see I might have gone the most awful crumpler. I've got in me all the impulses which have embittered father and some of his deadly, middle-class respect-

ability. If I fell in love physically, heaven knows where I should finish—marriage with somebody completely unsuitable to all the other bits of me. Passion isn't eternal and when it ended, I should have to live with a blank for the rest of my life."

"Divorce," said Jane.

"A series of them? If once I let myself go, there would be all father to satisfy, as well as the natural ME. Think of coping with forty years of sex restraint." Zara began to laugh. "From the virtues of our fathers, good Lord deliver us," she intoned.

"You're only postponing the crash," said Jane, "you've terrified yourself into an exaggerated conception of your own not unusual temperament—" but she couldn't go on. Zara's eyes were mocking her. "You'd have me release the beasts?" she asked as she got up, simulating a yawn.

Jane replied with conviction. "Yes."

"If you're going to get into that frilly thing on the bed, I'd better leave you to it. I wish I could induce my hair to do all those unnatural tricks," said Zara, picking up her belongings.

But her sister persisted, "Go off the deep-end, or for a week-end! Do anything, but get rid of this obsession that you're unlike other people. You've been hungry too long. That's all and, if you marry Christopher, I take it you'll be starved."

"A fashionable remedy for more imposing complaints than mine," said Zara from the doorway.

She proceeded to lose herself in thickly carpeted corridors redolent of bath-salts, because she was thinking that she hadn't really explained Christopher-

Carlyon, but perhaps one couldn't explain the person with whom one was in love.

She thought of him while she dressed, seeing him in a grey suit standing in the narrow oblong of light at the bottom of the stairs in Shepherd's Market. His face, that day, had been a little tanned, which had added a spurious strength to the straight, delicate features. Tall and beautifully put together, he had stood there waiting for her and there had been eagerness in his eyes, which were younger than anything in Jane's world, and in the hands with which he had helped her out of a borrowed car.

Zara was late and she didn't realise the enormity of her offence till she met John's reproachful glance. Even his speech was puckered as he said, "*Now,* I think we can go in."

At the long mahogany table, Zara relapsed into thoughts of Christopher. She wanted him the more because she was so uncertain of her title. Christopher-Carlyon would never belong to anyone and Zara, in her more rational moments, knew it, but he represented to her the love with which she'd been in love before she knew it incomplete. Christopher gave back to her the glamour of her illusions, all neatly repolished. With him there would be continual interest and no physical emotion. Zara had received the moon and was beginning to wonder if she could possibly change it into something different.

## CHAPTER XIV

The following morning Jane's party was greatly improved by the arrival of an Interesting Woman, who was one of the best-known hostesses in England. She was always perfectly dressed, but her clothes were never obtrusive. They were just right and that was the end of it.

To her amazement Zara found herself walking round the extremely expensive gardens, where, amidst batteries of greenhouses, everything looked defenceless and out of season, and telling the newcomer all about Christopher-Carlyon.

The Interesting Woman had to gift of being interested in one person at a time. When she made friends, she stuck to them. Her loyalty was one of the few stable elements in London life.

"You must bring your young man to stay at Widelands," she told Zara, after they had gone twice round the garden, and the girl felt that something nice had been given to her.

"It's great fun being married, isn't it?" continued the Interesting Woman, "and it's the only thing that one can do absolutely for oneself." And by means of such remarks, she inoculated Zara's engagement with the quality it had hitherto lacked. Under her alchemy Christopher-Carlyon became a perfectly normal fiancé, and marriage with him the happiest possible climax.

By lunch time the Interesting Woman had made another conquest and Zara a friend.

Because Christopher had the habit of telephoning, the engagement soon became public property, and the girl an object of interest, for, robbed of any other form of human sacrifice, the Briton still appreciates the immolation of a vestal foreshadowed in white satin—or it may be gold brocade—at the altar of St. Margaret's and consummated in white triple ninon —or it may be golden crêpe de chine—at some conniving country-house.

Zara began to feel she had done something clever. She would have expanded under the approval of John who took her to see an extraordinary number of animals of different species, about all of whom he was particularly knowing, scratching their noses, backs or quarters in just the right places and talking prolifically about Jane, as if in marrying, Zara was trying to imitate her sister's perfection, but at the back of her mind there was always Maurden, where Christopher belonged. The Castle had lived for seven hundred years. With all that experience it ought to be able to keep what it had got—the spirit of Christopher-Carlyon.

Zara, walking soberly beside her brother-in-law, decided that she had not fully appreciated Christopher's charm. It was insistent. It carried one away on a magic carpet. It opened all sorts of new doors and one couldn't possibly tell what lay on the other side. Zara drew a deep breath and looked blank when John asked what she thought of his favourite yearling. At that moment horses were no more to

her than substantial oblongs with a leg at each corner. Pulling herself together she managed to contribute a few satisfactory remarks, but her mind was in an express train, preferably a special, racing Londonwards.

Her body followed it next day, accompanied by the Interesting Woman who made them all very comfortable without any effort at all.

Christopher-Carlyon was on the platform and he saw nobody but Zara. He had a great deal to tell her and she found difficulty in extricating him from his ideas in order to introduce him, but she was, at that moment, intensely proud of him. He was so straight and well-made. His clothes were old and so well-fitting, and his charm had nothing familiar, or seeking, in it. He asked nothing. He wanted nothing. His detachment from people was rather splendid. Zara sketched a throne behind him and found it suitable. He was the one person she knew who might, like the Haitian Emperor, have marched a battalion of guards over the edge of a precipice in order to prove their discipline.

The Interesting Woman was inviting Christopher-Carlyon to Widelands and he was actually accepting. Zara was amazed. She hadn't yet realised that people always did what the Interesting Woman wanted.

"How did you manage it?" she asked while the two young men sought taxis, and her companion laughed. She was small and bone-perfect, with the loveliest feet and ankles, on which she moved with such nice balance that when she danced, people stopped to watch the effortless grace of a leaf, wind-driven. She was

grey-haired and enjoyed it. She did nothing to her face, which was arresting with the beauty of life and experience. She held her head high and when, across a crowded room, a stranger saw her, he realised a personality unafraid.

Zara did not realise all this, but she was under the spell of a singular charm, and even when Christopher put her into the cab, his fingers sending a thrill up her arm, she looked back to catch a last smile from the woman whom nobody ever referred to as "little" because she was so assured and cool and pleasantly informed.

"Zara," said Christopher-Carlyon as soon as the door was shut, "I've seen the most lovely bit of glass. It's—" He described a square-shouldered Waterford decanter in the language of an expert, but the girl didn't mind because he was holding her hand and they were sitting so close together that their shoulders touched. Queer what a lot of comfort could be got out of a shoulder.

"I've escaped from the Brewery," said Christopher when he had exhausted the subject of the decanter, "because I couldn't wait till to-night to see you. We are dining together, aren't we? We ought to go to the Ritz and have a table smothered in orchids, instead—"

Zara interrupted. "Instead of which we will eat in Soho and the blesséd thing is that it doesn't matter a bit."

"But it does," said Christopher-Carlyon. "I want to give you the world and I can't even give you a decent meal. Money oughtn't to matter so much. It

ought to grow loose on the hedges so that we could all pick as much as we need."

"There aren't any hedges in London," said Zara, loving him inordinately and hoping that he knew it.

"But it is rotten, you know. One oughtn't to have to think about money—it's cramping and chilly, like a lukewarm bath. When I got away from Hounslow to-day I realised how wonderful it all is, the sun and the colour of the leaves and you. I ought to be able to enjoy it all for three hundred and sixty-five days out of every year, instead of which I'm cooped up in an office with malt and the smell of malt. There are so few people who can really enjoy things—they ought to be subsidised by the nation!"

"And mummified after death for the Tate Gallery," suggested Zara, but she was troubled.

There was nothing Bohemian about Christopher-Carlyon. It would not amuse him to "make things do." If he sat on the floor, he would require it to be well-swept and covered with a Persian carpet. It struck Zara suddenly that, unless she went on working at Universal Ltd., to which Christopher would strongly object, they would have about six hundred a year to live on. Could one live on six hundred a year in Shepherd's Market in an atmosphere of Waterford glass and specimen chrysanthemums?

The cousin had fortunately decided to become honorary attaché to some agreeably remote embassy, and Christopher insisted on keeping his flat. The rent would be nominal, but there were only two rooms and a bath. Zara could not visualise the man beside her in such concentrated domesticity.

"Have you broken me to your people?" she asked.

"Yes. Mother was in a bad temper for twenty-four hours and father thinks we ought to be locked up."

Christopher-Carlyon was unimpressed by his parents' reactions to his news, announced dramatically with the soup. He had meant to reserve it till port had mellowed his father's outlook, but he felt triumphant and entirely superior to circumstance, so he acted the heir announcing his engagement to a princess, and so much enjoyed the subsequent scene that he had to tell Zara about it.

"Father wouldn't mind if I married a black, providing she had money, and mother has heiresses on the brain. The first question they asked was if you had money."

Christopher-Carlyon gloated over the effect he had produced. Achieving a theatrical detachment, he had inquired, "How does that concern you?" and watched with simulated amazement what threatened to be an apoplectic seizure.

Hilary Senior had forbidden his son everything within range of his imagination which was not very much, for the boy was worth more than the salary he received at the Brewery.

"D'you think I've slaved to keep up this place for you to make a fool of yourself with a penniless nobody?" he had raved, rousing in Christopher-Carlyon a rather desperate desire for money. He would like to have driven off there and then in a Rolls Royce, or anything that was still more obviously expensive. He remembered that he had a capital of

four thousand pounds invested in War Loan. He had spent it more than four thousand times in his imagination, buying the whole of Bond Street, and, since he had met Zara, half the diamonds in Cartier's window, but some relic of common sense had hitherto kept it intact. But he had friends in the city. They made fortunes out of considerably less than four thousand pounds. He might as well do it too.

The prospect had consoled him throughout an unpleasant week-end. He proceeded to share it with Zara and was annoyed by her opposition which was expressed in capitals and italics.

He supposed that women would never understand finance and decided that, after all, it would be more fun to speculate secretly and surprise his wife with the results.

Fortunately, in the excitement of being loved by Zara and in loving something of himself that he saw perfected in her, Christopher forgot his plans for getting rich quickly. He even took a lively interest in his financée's plans for being poor.

Christopher-Carlyon couldn't make love, not even the disjointed, amusing, modern kind of love, which is perfectly clear-sighted even in bed, but he could and did maké a comfortable feeling of intimacy. Zara began to wonder if the amazing adventure on which she was embarked were going to be an equally amazing success.

The engagement grew and prospered so far as the fiancés were concerned. At some unnoticed moment in it, Christopher fell in love. He began to see Zara as a real person and thereafter could not bear to be

away from her. He telephoned her two or three times a day and the girl told him: "I don't know what I saw in you before, but now that you're in love, you're irresistible."

The engagement was announced in defiance of the Hilarys who treated the affair as if it were a rash.

The Wincombes disapproved, but the brothers said little because they realised that, by opposition, they would alienate Zara without influencing her. Besides, they were both preoccupied. Robert was going to be second secretary in Paris. William was attracted to a young lady of means who obviously contemplated matrimony.

Mrs. Wincombe could not help thinking it was all very beautiful. She was glad that one of her children was going to marry for love. Then she remembered the price of coal. It was no moment for an improvident marriage. Still it was pleasant to think of a castle in the family, not that a castle could be compared with the solid advantages of John.

Mr. Wincombe based his disapproval on that of the Hilarys. No daughter of his should marry where she wasn't wanted. The flush became static whenever the engagement was mentioned. Secretly, he would have enjoyed the connection with Maurden. He had looked up the Hilarys in Burke, where they were accorded a column, and he bought a book entitled, "The Greater Country-Houses of England."

Feeling that, in Jane's case, he had bowed the head to Mammon, he had been ready to congratulate Zara on the fulfilment of his own ideals. He liked to think

of his daughter as the custodian of a national monument.

Prepared, magnanimously, to approve, though he would have preferred a rising young solicitor as a son-in-law, in fact anyone conspicuously rising, the Hilary attitude came as a shock. The inferiority complex bristled with as many new spines as a hedgehog in spring. Mr. Wincombe forbade the banns. As an afterthought, he told Zara that he could not possibly continue her allowance of sixty pounds a year.

The Authoress was amused by the engagement. "How surprising of you!" she wrote to Zara. "I am vastly intrigued and I should so like to know why you thought it necessary. He is absurdly good-looking, of course. You should find it agreeable sitting opposite him, but don't risk breakfast!" She offered a choice of houses for the honeymoon, a quantity of excellent advice, some epigrams and an Elizabethan casket in carved ivory.

The Well-Known Woman was disappointed. Of course, there was Maurden. It lent a certain cachet. For this reason, she decided to be seen at the wedding and she contributed a lamp of standard pattern, ordered from a catalogue.

The Peer lost several pounds in weight and was forced to take a cure out of season. Essentially kindly, he wandered up Bond Street intent on something lavish in the shape of a bracelet, but he was fascinated by a new kind of self-heating entrée-dish. His mouth watered. He sent Zara four, in the heaviest possible silver.

The Faun, who was ill, made a special journey from

the desolate but bracing eminence to which he had been condemned, in order to remonstrate. His cheek-bones were scarlet and terribly accentuated. The hollows under them were like pits. Only his eyes retained their vitality.

Zara exclaimed her distress. It was a Faun caught in human toils who shrugged emaciated shoulders and told her: "Don't bother about me. You can be cured and I can't."

The girl protested.

"Those whom the gods love—" mocked the boy, whose looks had been so spectacular that his contemporaries gave him their hearts or the latest in gents' silk dressing-gowns, according to their sex!

He dropped into a chair in the dingy back-room, and spoke to Zara like a father-confessor. The girl remembered that he had frequently fulfilled this office in Limehouse.

"Look here, Christopher's charming, I grant that, but he can't give you anything you need. You'll be faithful to him for a few years during which you'll be unhappy because the whole thing will be artificial. Then you'll meet someone else and be still more unhappy because, for the first time in your life, you'll be natural. That'll hurt you—how much I can't say, perhaps only because it doesn't hurt enough—a paradox, but disgustingly true. You can't be wholly consistent—there are too many of you. But for the Lord's sake, let each episode be consistent."

"What on earth d'you mean?"

"Well, don't beckon the policeman into your window at dead of night. Go off with him while it lasts."

"There won't be any policeman," said Zara.

"Of course there will, if you marry Christopher. You want to be loved." There was a flash of the old malice in the Faun's eyes. "You want it most indecently, my dear, and Christopher will worship you instead."

They discussed the point with frankness and some wit.

"I shall be so busy," said Zara at last. "I shan't have time for policemen."

"Get you to a nunnery and have done with it," retorted the Faun. "If you must be martyred, do it thoroughly and to some point."

Half-measures, thought Zara. She remembered that she hated them. The Faun got up and it looked as if his bones were only held together by the faultless cut of his suit. Zara's heart ached, because she hated to see beauty destroyed, but the boy wouldn't talk about himself. He lectured her with the apostolic sincerity which had thrilled East End congregations. Zara would have found it awkward, but for the change in his appearance.

"We've been friends," concluded the Faun. "Once, for twenty-four hours, I was in love with you, but you didn't happen to be there. I'd like to do you a good turn." He couldn't help adding, "The last." It dramatised the situation.

"Nonsense," said Zara and returned to the subject of Christopher which was the only one that interested her.

The Faun smiled. There was understanding in his eyes and it detracted from their familiar brightness.

"Well, if you must do it, keep a sense of proportion. The act of the flesh has so little importance. Remember that some day—and don't exaggerate. You always do, Zara. That's why you're so nice, like Marco Polo's adventures or Wagner at his most defiant. Good-bye."

A month later, he was in a sanatorium and his friends knew what he had known for months.

After that the engagement ran a natural course in the midst of unnatural silence. Jane insisted on paying for a trousseau, in which scarlet predominated and at which Zara protested because it contained nothing suitable for scrubbing floors. Christopher-Carlyon was assiduous as a shadow with a sense of humour and none too much of time.

The Interesting Woman contributed a deal of entertainment for she considered them Babes in the Wood and determined that the leaves should be of adequate quantity and quality.

The Explorer was kind when she wasn't being "intrepid" on platforms or at banquets. Vaguely she wondered why all the nicest girls married such effeminate young men. Had she had time for dalliance she would personally have preferred the popular idea of a sheikh, which name she was careful to pronounce correctly with a suitable hiss to the H. Fortunately her husband was six foot four, and of a determined character.

The Jew surprised Zara by saying nothing at all until she asked for an interview in which to tender her resignation. He refused to accept it.

"Sit down," he said, "and let's talk about this."

He swung round the chair which enclosed his broadening figure and leaned forward, his hands between his knees.

"You can't say I've bothered you with advice these last years," he began and Zara's mind rocketed backwards.

She owed a good deal to this man with the powerful head sunk between square shoulders. He had facilitated such career as she had chosen to adopt and done it without ostentation. He had never advised, but he had made many things possible. Had she been wholehearted she could have become an intrinsic portion of Universal Ltd.'s structure, but she resented the regularity of office life. The writing amused her and, imperceptibly, the Jew had arranged that punctuality should not be expected of her.

If he were disappointed at her failure as a business woman he made no more fuss than over her rejection of his suit. He took care that the whole family should, in their different ways, regard him as a friend and, if he had any private life apart from the office and the home which he shared with his mother, it was spent in making allowances for Zara. The girl had got into his blood and it was no easily tinctured stream, responding to all sorts of modern treatment.

The Jew believed in predestination, except with regard to finance. The racial tree which he represented would inevitably flourish and bear fruit. If it were not ordained that Zara should be the mother of his children it was no use struggling to make her his wife or his mistress. He believed that he could do either, were he to exert the power of which he was

fully conscious, but he wanted the girl to have a square deal.

Her engagement was a shock to him. He had to brace himself against it, for he was a man of strong feelings, leashed by common sense. He understood exactly why Zara had chosen to fall in love with young Hilary. It was a way out and, to the girl's inexperience, a more elastic one than he himself represented. That it was the wrong one, time alone could prove.

"What are you going to live on?" asked the Jew.

"Six hundred a year," replied Zara sweetly.

"You've earned that here for the last twelve months and wasted it on—what?"

"Living," retorted Zara in a still more saccharine voice.

The Jew responded at once. "Well, you can do your copy at home and we'll continue your salary so long as it's up to scratch. You'll have to put in a few hours here, but you've already suborned the timekeeper, so there'll be no difficulty about that." He smiled at her from behind the habitual cigar. "'Chief Contact' says marriage will broaden your work. You've given him some grey hairs lately."

Zara leaned back against the comfortably padded leather designed for the seduction of clients, and laughed.

"At the moment, I could be lyrical about anything, but I do wish you'd get a romantic account. I'm no good at alcohol."

"A djinn in every bottle," quoted the Jew, regarding one of the firm's most successful lay-outs. "You're rather good at phrases."

Only when she was out of the room, did the girl realise that her marriage had been considerably facilitated, but there had been neither discussion nor congratulation. "The mills of Israel grind slow, but they grind exceedingly small," she said to herself and, immediately, wondered what she meant.

## CHAPTER XV

For a long time Zara thought they would never be married and then, quite suddenly, they were. Christopher stage-managed it too beautifully. It was his wedding. Zara did not feel it was hers at all.

There were several half-page photographs of Maurden in the weekly papers and, inset, very small, the bride and groom. There were a number of wedding-presents, most of them unsuitable. There were Christopher's friends, who obviously regretted his loss. They were accustomed to make use of him. He was a convenient repository for their troubles. He could be counted on for a free meal or what they optimistically styled a loan. They had done their best to dissuade him from marriage and failed. Naturally they did not like Zara.

Then, at last, there was a day of fitful sunshine with cloud battalions racing before the attack of a North-Easter. Between two squalls Zara and Christopher were married in the church which stood knee-deep among new wands of bracken. Hilarys and Wincombes regarded each other with distaste from opposite sides of the aisle.

There were lilies, bushels of them, produced by a London florist at the behest of Christopher-Carlyon. Jane wore a hat that left nothing, not even the roots of her hair, to the imagination, and the Interesting

Woman had motored miles across country for the sake of saying something nice to a bride whom she felt might—shortly—need all the comfort she could get. Not that she would accept it, of course!

A few came down from London out of curiosity and still fewer because they wanted to pay tribute of their time.

The Jew did not come. He sent a diamond bracelet in which the stones dominated the setting. The recipient was puzzled until she realised that, short of a cheque or an insurance policy, he could have given nothing more easily translated into hard cash.

In deference to the opinions of Mr. Hilary and to the profound conviction of John Wincombe, to whom marriage was the only possible defence (and a frail one at that!) against temptations which appalled him, nothing was omitted from the service.

When a wan young clergyman, with a resonant voice, six children and a stipend inadequate for the education of one, became outspoken on the subject of continence, Zara looked up at Christopher-Carlyon. It struck her as particularly humorous that he should be informed of such inapposite reasons for marriage. But the man would not meet her smile. She doubted if he were conscious of her and, certainly, he heard no word of the eugenics intoned by the pale, young clergyman who was wondering, at that moment, whether birth-control were as iniquitous as he had been led to suppose. If they had a seventh child . . . his thoughts wandered to the stuffy Vicarage.

But Christopher-Carlyon was in uniform. Banners hung above his head. The strains of a mighty organ,

the applause of a nation thundered in his ears. An Archbishop was performing the ceremony. Incense hung round the high altar. Light poured through a stained glass window and, in its path, he stood, erect, motionless, the cynosure of every eye. Beside him—well, beside him was Zara and, eventually, he became aware of her.

Without hesitation or diffidence, apparently without feeling, he put the ring on her finger. His responses were heard all over the church—they were intended for an Abbey—and, as they went up to the altar, he walked back into the pageant of his imagination, only this time he took Zara with him.

She remained with him for the rest of the day. In fact, she was his only resource when, coming out into a gale, he lost his sense of being on a stage limelit by public interest. In the car he sat very close to her and spoke about her dress. "It staggered even me," he said with satisfaction and Zara was glad that she had taken so much trouble to be what she considered exaggeratedly spectacular.

They motored to one of their brother-in-law's many houses. It was rented for the occasion, which since he could bet about the probable duration of the marriage, seemed to John a sufficiently sporting event to justify the expenditure. Zara changed; Christopher-Carlyon opened telegrams. Both felt they had done something portentous and irrevocable.

The hunt followed the quarry. Amidst congratulations and a tempest of small talk, bride and groom took to drink. Life became quite ordinary again. Jane was determined that it should. She had even

provided suitable missiles. Shaking these out of their clothes, Christopher and Zara felt that after all, it was just possible the mistake was not quite so blatant as they had for the moment feared.

By the time they reached the "cottage" on the river, they were drugged by their own natural reactions. Zara was almost asleep and Christopher felt mildly protective. It was an agreeable sensation and he fostered it throughout the evening by fetching his wife all sorts of things which she did not need. They had a moment of mutual understanding at dinner when champagne appeared immersed in a gigantic white bow and the husband drank solemnly to his wife.

"It sounds horribly final," said Zara. "I feel as if I were carefully docketed and labelled."

Christopher-Carlyon winced. "I do so hate labels, don't you?" he said and his accomplice felt as if a small boy were trying to wriggle out of the unexpected result of his actions.

"The ink's not indelible," she said, playing up.

Christopher showed his gratitude by dragging his chair round the table so that he could reach Zara's hand. He laid it flat on his own. "It's the most perfect thing I've ever seen. So few women have good hands," he said. He bent to kiss it and a slow, painful thrill did something enervating and mysterious in Zara's nervous system.

Hours later, she awakened in the four-poster bed hung with amusing chintz and was surprised because a man lay beside her, his hair disarranged and his mouth a little open.

Zara felt slightly outraged and slightly amused. In

fact, all her feelings were slight. There was a maternal element among them, she supposed, or she would have been revolted by the accompaniment of stertorous breathing.

With this exception, the night was very still and something in Zara was still, as if it had been stunned. So it was all over and she need not have been afraid. What a fuss she had made. The beast, with whom she had wrestled for years, had turned out to be something quite domestic and suited to the hearth. She remembered, with a quickening of her heart, so that she put her hand up to it as if to prevent the escape of something precious, the moment when Christopher had leaned over her and kissed her lids and she had drawn him down imagining she would take life itself into her arms. Instead, she had inexperience for a bedfellow. Christopher-Carlyon was gentle but not inspired. Zara imagined the boy a man and was bewildered by his half-reluctant earnestness. There were tears on her cheek and she was not certain if they were her own. Well, it was over. Zara stretched herself cautiously and wondered how long it would be before she got used to the limited space at her disposal. Then she laughed very softly. It was distinctly humorous that this should seem to her the most drastic of the matrimonial aspects to which she must accustom herself.

Zara slid down very gently, so that her head was level with Christopher's. She wished he would shut his mouth. He looked inert and uninhabited, whereas the Faun, whom she had seen asleep in a field, gave the impression of an animal with muscles relaxed and

senses alert. His hard young face had looked as if it were amused by the adventures of his questing spirit. But the Faun was not interested in women.

For the third time Zara told herself that it was over —a grossly exaggerated sensation. She had been disappointed and relieved, but not in the least excited.

A fortnight passed without any particular emotion. Christopher-Carlyon was a perfect companion. He was observant and interested in everything which attracted his attention. He had a fund of irresponsible gaiety which took ten years from the age of which Zara was prematurely conscious. They played like two children with nature as an accomplice, but their playtime ended with the light, which Christopher-Carlyon extinguished before getting into bed.

Zara told him he was a devout husband, which made him aware of defects he could neither understand nor alter. His wistfulness was disarming as a child's, but Zara, looking ahead, wondered if they could possibly go on being friends unless they gave up the pretence of being lovers. If she had a child, of course, it might be different. She thought she would like one until she remembered the tenuous accommodation in Shepherd's Market.

When the sun shone, Christopher's spirits rioted. His vitality depended, to a great extent, on the weather. Fortunately April was kind. It was just a year since they had first met in this setting. Sitting on the bank, while Christopher-Carlyon waded in search of watercress, Zara told him of the Authoress' project. He was irritated.

"I hate other people's plans. They're about as innocuous as dynamite!"

"Do you feel blown up?"

Zara, hatless, was sufficiently attractive to restore his good humour or it may have been a sudden effect of lighting which caught his eye.

"Yes, completely, up to Olympus, or wherever the gods linger. You look like a goddess yourself. You ought to have berries in your hair."

"Out of season," mocked Zara, "but I suppose you are not hampered by seasons on Olympus."

Christopher, muddy to the waist, dropped beside her and the top bit of him looked absurdly immaculate.

"Your hands are much nicer than mine," said Zara. "How can you possibly be sensible and practical and material with those hands? You're pre-doomed to disaster."

Christopher-Carlyon entered into the spirit of the game. He always did, so long as he could play a leading part. "What sort of disaster?"

"Me."

Zara expected to be kissed. She felt that she must be looking quite nice enough to warrant it.

But Christopher became suddenly serious. "Sold again," said one Zara to another, while she listened to her husband—yes, he really was her husband, how odd —saying, "Everyone I've known at all well has always wanted to change me into someone quite different. D'you want to, too?"

"No," said Zara and meant it because it was the daytime and as a companion for a muddy woodland walk, full of beauties so transient that three quarters

of the world blundered over them unseeing, Christopher-Carlyon was quite perfect.

The birches were whips of silver. They suggested flagellation. Zara thought of satyrs, Christopher of a monastery where men had time to think. The sky was red as they ran up the last slope, hungry because both remembered at the same moment that they had ordered crumpets.

"A sign," said Christopher-Carlyon, "that our minds are equally great."

"A sign that they fit," said Zara.

"Darling, our minds do fit most beautifully."

After the crumpets were eaten, they spent two completely happy hours sitting on the floor, faces flushed by an unnecessary fire, smoking, Zara through a long holder, and reading in what Christopher called "a conversational manner," which meant that, whenever either came across an arresting paragraph he or she read it aloud and discussion followed.

## CHAPTER XVI

The flat seemed very small when inhabited by two people above the normal height. It was impossible for either not to know exactly what the other was doing at any given moment. From the Jacobean bed, which filled most of the room and which was still not quite long enough for Christopher-Carlyon, so that they wondered if, in summer, it would be possible to use the window-sill as a foot rest, Zara could follow in detail the course of her husband's bath.

If she tried to dress at the same time, there were altogether too many bodies in the room. Fortunately they were nice bodies and each admired the other's, but Christopher hated seeing what he called scullery preparation.

"I don't want to know how food's cooked," he said, "and the same applies to your make-up."

So Zara applied rouge and powder hastily while Niagara was going on next door, and Christopher-Carlyon criticised the result. He studied Zara as if she were a picture, pointing out where something could be added or omitted.

He was never bad-tempered, but sometimes, without any apparent reason, he descended into such depths of depression that no other human being could plumb them. Zara learned to fear this condition as if it were climatic and therefore irresistible. In their

cramped quarters it seemed to be thicker than a November fog. The girl found herself struggling against it as if it were a tangible enemy. In time she learned the remedies which were likely to be most effective and applied them heedless of cost.

But for the duration of what she termed "the plague," the flat seemed full of elbows. Zara could not make herself sufficiently small and every inhuman agent seemed bent on being conspicuously disagreeable. The perversity of the chafing-dish knew no bounds. It had no sense of honour. Balanced on a board, laid across the bath, for there was no room for a table and the flats were much too superior for cooking apparatus, it drank all the methylated in one gulp, spat viciously and died. If Zara, undaunted, refilled the lamp so that the skins of the breakfast sausages might have an extra crimp, it enjoyed itself immensely by spilling flame all over the board, and if it could drop some into the bath, it considered the game was won.

It was the same thing with the patent coffee-pot which suffered from constipation whenever Christopher, oppressed and blank, sat staring at the breakfast-table with the air of an Israelite expecting immediate manna. Zara's sense of humour nearly always triumphed when, alone in the bathroom, she felt she was Moses conjuring coffee from the bowels of an unsympathetic rock, but the sight of Christopher-Carlyon out-of-reach-at-the-bottom-of-a-well suppressed her satisfaction. She felt it fizzle out like a damp squib, which was unpleasant, for self-assurance was essential in view of the number of

domestic problems offered by the flat, whose sense of proportion was obviously outraged by the multiplication of its inmates.

Zara was not by nature either tidy or economical, but unless everything were put away in the right place at the right moment, the flat became an inelastic waste-paper basket in which its owners floundered among the débris of their occupations.

"Human beings have too many elbows," said Zara when she had cannoned into a restless Christopher. "We eat too much and we move about too much. D'you realise how much money is wasted each week on fuelling us? We're more expensive than any system of central heating."

Christopher, recovering a shaving-brush which had strayed into a saucepan—it didn't occur to him that Zara had probably used it for whipping cream—suggested that they should become Buddhists and wax fat on contemplation.

"We could have imaginary dinners. Think what a lot of trouble it would save and nothing would be out of season. I could eat strawberries, while you were trifling with a grouse."

"Instead of which, we shall masticate an omelette which would be more useful as a weapon of defence. Imagine the surprise of a burglar stunned by an omelette. I do hope they give you a really solid lunch at the Brewery."

Christopher said they did. Immaculately dressed, with a gardenia in his buttonhole, because he could not resist the scent of them as he passed the flower-shop under the arch, he seated himself with his back

to a curtain of Venetian brocade. Its crimson made of his pale, historic face, which always looked like someone's most distinguished ancestor, a portrait by Bronzino, for the Italian knew the value of trappings.

The table was genuine Chippendale. A great bunch of tulips flared out of a Waterford glass bowl and reminded Zara of the appalling amount of money Christopher wasted on flowers. He was actively unhappy unless he could bring her a different kind each day and the habit irritated her almost beyond endurance. She wouldn't have minded if he had chosen to play skittles with the ten commandments, but almost immediately after her marriage, she discovered, to her shamed discomfort, that she had inherited her father's dread of debt.

At first she laughed at Christopher-Carlyon's habit of buying whatever happened to attract him, whether he could pay for it or not. Then she remonstrated with him, but Christopher-out-of-the-well was an incurable optimist. He refused to think about money. It was such a boring subject. Consequently Zara went round London paying out of the salary she still earned at Universal Ltd. for the unnecessary treasure which Christopher accumulated, and the man's self-respect remained inviolate because he paid the rent and such household books as Zara thought fit to produce.

Erect and amused, he considered the omelette and found it wanting. "Let's go across to the Berkeley," he said. "Put on that amazing red dress which makes you look like the worst woman in Hollywood, and let's do all the things we can't afford. It's such fun."

Zara, appreciating the charm of his eagerness and

longing to dance with him in some spellbound place, where, under the guidance of Ambrose, they could lose themselves in a less difficult world, remembered the state of their banking account.

Also she had washed her own hair and the result was not very successful. It stood up and looked at her instead of outlining intimately the admirable shape of her head. She had not had time to manicure her nails and she'd lost the lipsalve which matched the red dress. Christopher-Carlyon took all these things for granted, but, though he prided himself on his acute observation, he had become far too accustomed to Zara to notice when she fell short of his standard.

Had she realised this, she might not have infused such fervour into her opposition, but she felt plain and she had blistered her hand against that diabolical chafing-dish, and they were perilously near an overdraft, so she dissuaded Christopher-Carlyon with what she hoped was tact.

But he was unusually obdurate. On the way back from Hounslow he had walked through every bit of green he could find. The sun had got into his blood. He wanted to celebrate. If Zara had said she was tired he would have understood at once and he would have been charmingly sympathetic, but he felt her excuses were faked. What did it matter about her hair? She always made every other woman in the room look like a housemaid. It gave him a shock each time he saw her with women whom he had hitherto thought beautiful. They were like candles extinguished by forked lightning.

"I wish that occasionally you would do absurd, illogical, extravagant things just because you want to do them, without bothering about whether we can afford them or not. You lose a lot of amusement because, after all, the things one can't possibly afford are the most supremely worth while doing."

Zara, who would have gone to ridiculous lengths to please him and who was aware of the growth within her of the quality she had most deprecated in her mother, an instinct for service as dumb as it was unrelenting, felt that he was unjust.

She gave way, of course, just when it was too late and Christopher-Carlyon told her so.

"The rose and gold have gone," he said. "I wanted to dance myself free of discretion. With music and an indecent amount of drink, I could have talked to you this evening. I could have told you lots of things, but they're all gone."

Zara was inordinately distressed. She urged all sorts of hastily fabricated reasons why they should, after all, go to the Berkeley, or wherever he liked, but the seams gaped. Christopher-Carlyon was not to be deceived. He repeated, with sufficient good-humour, that it did not matter in the least and, eventually, he made excellent coffee out of a machine which behaved with the propriety of a child at a Sunday-school treat. But then Christopher was, in most household matters, far more deft than Zara. Her hands were as inadequate with needles and cotton, with cooking implements and all the other impedimenta of housekeeping, as they were assured on the bridle of a difficult three year old, but Christopher-Carlyon's hands were his

servants. His movements were instinctive. Each one was complete, with no raw ends to indicate that his muscles had done too much or too little. His brain and his body were in such close communion that the one answered immediately and with the utmost exactitude the behest of the other. If he stooped to pick up something, it was done before the average eye was aware of the movement. All his body was balanced, so everything it did had the effortless perfection of a circle.

Zara's limbs were strong and impetuous. They carried her too far in every direction. She had the clumsiness and the instinctive grace of a pagan to whom control is less important than acquisition. Christopher-Carlyon was as efficient about the flat as any woman, but Zara was too big for flats.

By the end of the evening the couple had rediscovered the fractions of each other which they believed to be most important—Zara had forgotten about her hair. They had drunk an inordinate amount of black coffee. They had talked a great deal about a number of impersonal subjects. The girl was very wide-awake and the man pleasantly stimulated. The conversation drifted from the construction of a recent play to the ingredients of love. Christopher-Carlyon was a monogamist. It didn't occur to him that love could be connected with any woman but Zara. For him, alone among the modern herd, pursuing, capturing, destroying and discarding, love was really "the tender passion" of Victorian rhetoric. He felt immensely tender towards this wife of his who bewildered him because she wanted so much more and so much less

than he could give her, with the result that whenever he felt closest to her, he was conscious of a demand which forced them apart.

At this moment, touched by his expression, which seemed to her that of a child seeking fairy gold, Zara flung herself, in one impetuous movement, out of her chair, across the hearth-rug and on to her knees beside him. Instinctively he recoiled for there was in Christopher-Carlyon no child needing the comfort of a friendly touch, but a man imbued with the austerity of the old confessors, seeking a grail beyond the average horizon.

Chilled by the almost imperceptible withdrawal, Zara pretended that she had no intention of touching him. It was several minutes before she felt that she might safely lean against him and, in this position, which she made as impersonal as possible, she wondered how he managed to reconcile himself to the necessity of sharing with her the only bed in the flat. Something must obviously be done about it.

Meanwhile Zara had instituted what she felt was a passing imitation of intimacy. Bedroom manners were obviously important, and in the case of Christopher-Carlyon they had to be pre-arranged. There was in him an inordinate capacity for affection and none at all for passion. So long as Zara could make it appear that they shared the Jacobean bed in order to satisfy the former, she felt that the situation was endurable. Consequently the too-short four-poster, hung with embroidery attributed to Mary Stuart, became no more than a sofa before the sitting room fire, which they shared to facilitate conversation, and on which,

eventually, they fell asleep, hand in hand perhaps, or, in moments of uncommunicated loneliness, the girl's head on the man's thin shoulder. Their bodies were quite friendly, but they knew nothing particular about each other. Only Zara felt the sword stretched between them.

## CHAPTER XVII

After a year of marriage, Zara felt that she knew less of Christopher-Carlyon than when she proposed to him. He had objected to her continuing in the employ of Universal Ltd., because, theoretically, he disapproved of women working. They were decorative objects and, for them, there should be no utilitarian boundaries of time. It annoyed him to find the girl bent over a desk, so immersed in a difficult piece of copy that she forgot to welcome him. He detested ink-stained fingers or the clatter of a typewriter. The Zara he admired was a being detached from the litter of every day life.

He wanted a son, but Zara protested that, for the moment, she was fully occupied as a typist. She had no time to be a mother. One evening, when Christopher-Carlyon spoke more than usual of his prospective child, she reminded him, severely, of the greengrocer's bill, which was abnormally large because fruit looked so effective when it was piled with a prolific disregard for season in a newly acquired Bristol dish.

"Put it in the waste-paper basket," said Christopher. "Why d'you suppose I got such a large one?"

He deposited himself on his favourite stool and lit a cigarette. "I think I love children more than anything else in the world," he said. "If I had a son I should be perfectly happy. I'd teach him everything

myself. He'd always be with me and I'd make such a friend of him."

Zara was hurt. Christopher-Carlyon had an uncanny habit of using a scalpel on feelings of whose existence he was unaware. The girl wanted a child because she hoped it would give her something more of Christopher, but, when he spoke like this, she was afraid that paternity would take him away from her altogether. For a moment she contemplated expressing her potential jealousy, but, on second thoughts, she refrained. She was getting rather good with a brake.

Zara stifled a sigh, for, twelve months ago, she had imagined she could say anything in the world to Christopher-Carlyon. As it was, she sat in the armchair which had lost a castor and remembered simultaneously that every stocking she possessed needed darning and that Christopher-Carlyon loathed to see her so employed.

"Where should we put it?" she asked, referring thus impersonally to the child who, for Christopher-Carlyon, was already an individual complete with name, appearance and characteristic habits.

"The next flat's empty. We could knock a doorway into it. The back room would make a splendid nursery—lots of sun and a tree. What more could he want?"

"A great deal," said Zara and, because she was tired and because she felt it was so unfair that she couldn't give Christopher-Carlyon everything he wanted at once, she burst the beautiful bubble he was blowing with a remark about the rent.

The flat had not proved so cheap as they had expected. Nothing was inclusive. Coal, light, telephone, service, the food they were sure they had not eaten and something imperceptible which was mysteriously known as "heating" inflated the bill to unnatural proportions. Zara woke up every Saturday with apprehension constricting whatever organs are most susceptible to bills and the arguments appertaining thereto. After discovering that Christopher-Carlyon paid whatever he was asked and added a tip which would have done credit to Midas, Zara undertook the dissection of the weekly account, which immediately dwindled, as did also the good nature of the communal domestic who disapproved of "young marrieds" because they stayed at home too much.

"We couldn't afford a second flat," she said firmly. "You know, really, we can't afford this one. I wish you'd agree to move. There are some very nice new blocks in Kensington, much nearer your work and infinitely more convenient than this. Wouldn't you like more space? In summer there really isn't room to breathe."

Fugitively she remembered that it hadn't mattered last summer, because the world was as wide as their imagination. But Christopher-Carlyon had had influenza three times during the winter and Zara had slept on the sofa in the sitting-room until Jane, hearing of it, had sent her the latest and most expensive thing in folding beds, so compact that it shut automatically whenever its occupant moved. After wrangling with this inhuman innovation for a week, during which she became hollow-eyed and nervous,

Zara succeeded in breaking its backbone and, with it, the quality of its resistance. Thereafter it became a sort of hammock in which its occupant nightly cultivated curvature of the spine. She awoke to the realisation that the flat really was impossible, but Christopher-Carlyon wouldn't agree.

He went off to the brewery every morning in the middle of breakfast and returned when the spirit moved him, which might not be till seven or eight at night. For just as he would not catch the correct trains unless forced into them by Zara, so he would never say what time he would be back on any particular evening. He had to feel free and, as time was the only element of which he could dispose, he spent it as other men spend money. He would pay half an hour for the sight of the sunset, or an hour to look at the daffodils in Regent's Park, never oblivious of the fact that Zara might be waiting, but storing it up like a child keeping the currants out of his cake for the last mouthful.

To him Zara was something rare and beautiful which was intent on spoiling itself. He wanted to make her free of his own enchanted planes, but she kicked away the ladder with her anxiety about the rent. Christopher-Carlyon hated money. It had no right to intrude into his personal privacy, but Zara was always conscious of it. She hardly ever spoke about it because it worried Christopher, but her desk was littered with sums, most of them incorrectly added, and, very slowly, a crease was forming between her brows. In repose her face was beginning to look strained because there was so much that she had to

remember, the things she mustn't say because they hurt or bored or disillusioned Christopher, the familiarities she must avoid because they impinged on Christopher's reticence, the subterfuges by which he must be made to believe they were living within his means. It was all very wearing.

Zara, glancing at the man opposite her, who looked as if he needed bracing country air and unlimited stout, was sharply conscious of his charm. It resisted ill-health and the smoking fire. It was not affected by the disappointment in his voice when he said:

"I couldn't bear to live in Kensington. I thought you understood. It is so drab. I couldn't be intimately connected with a slice of bricks and mortar, cut to pattern and wedged in between similar layers like one of those sickly cakes."

"I should have thought you had enough personality to be indifferent to your surroundings," said Zara and wondered wearily why she found it necessary to flatter.

Christopher-Carlyon explained with patience that he felt an outcast unless he could have a background which appealed to him and Zara, who had so often heard him say that he couldn't live in such a place or with such a person, went on remembering—the absurd number of shirts he sent to the wash each week, the flowers brazening their beauty and their cost under the photograph of herself which she hated, the clothes that wanted mending, the deadness of her last copy at which "Chief-Control" had raised startled eyebrows, the fact that the chimney needed sweeping and that she was, undoubtedly, a bad manager and that

she loved Christopher-Carlyon almost more than she could bear for no logical reason, and that Jane's baby, which was naturally a boy, had cost three hundred pounds to bring into the world and that they couldn't possibly pay for the Persian rug which Christopher had bought without consulting her and that, somehow, she was a failure.

Christopher-Carlyon, having explained to his own satisfaction why they could not leave Shepherd's Market and why Zara must get one of the new impossibly long dresses in which she would look more lovely than anyone else in the world, suggested bed.

Zara felt she couldn't bear the intimacy which had no foundation of spent desire. Looking at Christopher-Carlyon, tall and perfectly balanced, with every beautiful line apparent, she felt that she had been cheated of something essential.

"You've no right to be so attractive," she told him. "You're a danger to the community. You oughtn't to be allowed to go about giving incredible flowers to women you don't love."

Christopher-Carlyon was puzzled. "But I do love you," he said. "What can I do to convince you? You make me feel empty—it's a terrible feeling—is there nothing of me that satisfies you?"

He knelt beside her as she sat by the desk and would have put his arms round her, but she held him away, for she was at the mercy of her nerves and her senses. She could lie automatically. "You give me everything, more than I had imagined possible. Don't bother about me to-night. I'm probably getting

'flu." But she could not bear his touch, because she wanted so much more.

Christopher was suddenly and quite disastrously understanding. "I told you there was nothing in me," he said. "I'm hopelessly ordinary and conventional and commonplace."

"Don't," said Zara who couldn't bear to see him destroying his own idols.

Christopher-Carlyon kissed her hair which was untidy. "You're the most wonderful thing that has ever happened," he said, and his wife muttered something about wanting to be wonderful for him, before putting her head down on her arms and weeping unrestrainedly.

Christopher-Carlyon was shattered. He didn't know what to do. He wanted to kill himself at once and to comfort Zara at the same time. He had comforted so many women in the most beautiful and effective manner. They thought him little short of an archangel and wished him less impervious to themselves, as differentiated from their griefs. But Zara was too near him. He couldn't visualise her properly. She was out of perspective.

He walked about the room wondering what he could give her—to-morrow he would find something exquisite—and all the time Zara wept because life was narrowing to a series of small worries, all of them unnecessary and most of them connected with money which oughtn't to matter at all, but which, owing to the optimism of Christopher-Carlyon, mattered so much that it threatened to obscure everything else.

"I can't bear it," said Christopher at last. "I don't understand. Why are you so unhappy? Is my love nothing to you? It's all I have."

His voice was so desolate that Zara was obliged to look up. Tears had blotched her skin and her eyelids were swollen. She remembered the necessity for looking beautiful and made a movement to escape, but where could she go in the flat? There was no privacy. She could not lock Christopher out of the only bedroom.

Eventually, after her husband's tenderness had nearly driven her mad, she found refuge in the bathroom and there, surrounded by the remains of dinner and the elements of breakfast, amidst which Christopher's huge jar of verbena crystals looked singularly out of place, she took stock of the asceticism on which, for a year, she had counted.

It was in rags. And she happened to be in love with Christopher-Carlyon! Zara's sense of humour struggled up from the depths where the beast stirred. She might go to Christopher who, by this time, was doubtless half-asleep and try to rouse in him that which did not exist.

Zara regretted her ignorance and the fact that life was not at all like the books which the Cabinet Minister suppressed. Christopher would be hurt, or shocked, or puzzled, but he certainly would not respond, with the result that his wife would feel inadequate as well as overwrought. How convenient were the labels with which one could disguise desire! She might go to Christopher and say, "I want to be

the mother of your son." Why a son? Why not a daughter? It was not so rhetorical, she supposed, two syllables instead of one, and in any case, women always saw themselves as the mothers of sons, not of other women just like themselves and therefore knowing too much about them. That would be a polite way of saying, "I want you more than common sense." But the result would not be that which she desired. Christopher-Carlyon would become unbearably tender. Zara emitted something which might pass as laughter and threw open the window. There was a policeman on the pavement below, and he looked up.

"Don't beckon a policeman into your window." The Faun had said it the last time she saw him. Since then he had died of cancer.

Zara remembered how indignantly she had replied: "There will be no policeman."

She smiled, not without bitterness. Well, here was one underneath her window. The Faun had been right.

With a last look into the mirror, which showed her face stained and unattractive, she stole into the bedroom. Christopher had not extinguished the light. He was waiting for her. As she got into bed, she hated the limitations of the Jacobean four-poster. She would be forced to simulate affection for the body which she desired. Her muscles stiffened as Christopher-Carlyon touched her.

"You're over-tired," he said and drew her gently against him. "You must go to sleep at once—are you comfortable? D'you want some more pillow?"

Zara bit into her lip till it bled, but she said nothing

which bore any relation to her thoughts. After all, there was nothing one could say to Christopher-Carlyon on such a subject, unless one quoted poetry. Zara couldn't think of a suitable line.

## CHAPTER XVIII

THAT year they spent Whitsuntide at Widelands. The house was famous as one of Adam's masterpieces. It stood on a slope above the river, firmly rooted as if it were part of the country-side and of the history which Palmerston had made within its walls. Widelands was an established fact. It had counted in the politics of England for too many generations to lend itself kindly to change, but its present châtelaine had ministered to it with an art as supreme as it was inconspicuous.

Zara was conscious of complete satisfaction when she entered the hall. The proportions of Widelands had this effect on the elect and it was enhanced by the warmth of their welcome, for the secret of the Interesting Woman's pre-eminence as a hostess was that she liked her guests and they knew it.

At the door of the great salon, which was like a garden, for the colour scheme of each room at Widelands was accentuated by carefully chosen flowers, the hostess stood on tiptoe to enfold Zara in an embrace, reassuring and entirely individual. The Interesting Woman did not repeat herself.

She drew Zara into another room where tea was spread on many tables, talking to Christopher-Carlyon over her shoulder, so that he need not feel out of it. A clamour of voices accompanied the sounds of

humanity indulging one of its more conspicuous appetites. The Jew, who was sitting a little apart, as if he were waiting for something or someone, got up to welcome Zara.

"I have not seen you for a long time, and you are looking tired," he said, "sit down," and the girl found herself established in a comfortable chair with cup and plate on a small table beside her.

The Jew had not asked how many lumps of sugar she took. He remembered, and when he settled himself beside her, it was as if he carried on a conversation which had been interrupted for a few minutes.

"You are comfortingly familiar," she told him. "I believe, if I didn't meet you for ten years you would be just the same and I should finish the sentence which I'd broken off when you went to the Antipodes."

The Jew smiled. He had acquired a few grey hairs over the prominent temples which added to his distinction. Zara noticed that his features had hardened in the last year. They appeared to have been carved in the fewest possible lines, but they were permanent. So many faces look as if they were temporarily thrown together from material selected haphazard on a bargain counter, but the Jew's head was immutable as the caste of Herod on a coin. Even his nostrils, wide and upward curved, had the decision of hewn metal. There was nothing soft and nothing transient in the face which was beginning to show the engraving of time at the corners of the lips and across the brow.

"I do not change," he said. "You see I am quite certain of values," and Zara felt that she had been paying a high price for suppositional security.

"It must be nice to be so sure of yourself," she said, half in earnest.

"What have you got to make for assurance?" asked the Jew, looking round the tables where a party as divergent and as provocatively blended as the chef's fruit salad, pulled to pieces the idols which the press set up for the benefit of the public.

"Patriotism is a liqueur, suitable for the post-prandial palate," an Editor with red hair was saying to the Well-Known Woman, who had managed to be invited to Widelands for the first time after many years of untiring effort, and who felt she ought to signalise her victory by the sort of wit which she appreciated in the newest novels. But everyone was talking at once and against the delicate austerity of the blue walls, with their colourless mouldings, the wit of the average modern was apt to appear cheap as incandescent gas.

The Well-Known Woman relaxed sufficiently to study her surroundings. The few pieces of furniture were arranged with restraint and a certain formality to accentuate the value of space. Tall white lilies, with the pollen removed from their stamens, stood sentinel against the windows.

Zara, eating a bacon sandwich which was very hot and very good, pondered the question of assurance. The Jew was possessed of this enviable quality to a greater extent than anyone else she knew.

"You pay exorbitant prices for temporary emotions," said the man who filled her thoughts to the exclusion of all else whenever she happened to be with him.

"And you?" she asked.

"We have no use for passing currents. We are usurers of our own feelings," said the Jew and when he smiled his eyes became luminous, so that they seemed to reflect the centuries of co-ordinated thought which lay behind them.

Zara, comparing this successful pirate on the High Seas of trade with the unsophisticated crowd talking, smoking and eating apparently at the same time, realised that he was differentiated from the rest of the people in the room by his deep-rooted stability. Most of the tea-party was being brilliant or at least intelligent without any particular effort, but it gave an impression of chaos. The Jew, alone, was unmoved by any current which had not endured the crucible of time. "I shall call you Alpha and Omega," said Zara, crossly. "You are horribly inevitable and I do wish you could be friends with Christopher."

"Why?" asked the Jew and the girl could not answer.

"D'you want to insure against your own actions?"

"Of course," said Zara, lightly, and added, "you would be good for him. You're so practical."

The Jew's eyes were smiling. Zara thought they saw too much and she turned abruptly to the Editor who boomed at her that Robert's play was going to be produced by the Stage Society.

"What have you done with yourself lately?" he asked, and Zara remembered that she had not seen him half a dozen times since he played Cerberus at the Westminster party. She told him how bored she was with composing elegies in the graveyard of common sense. "How can one commit murder for the sake

of inducing that portion of the herd which has an instinctive dislike for decent English, to buy something which it doesn't want? Hypnotic prose, that's what we indulge in, and even Macaulay couldn't pare it finer!"

Cerberus was amused. He ran a hand, close-covered with reddish down, through his already disordered hair. "You might try something for me," he said.

"What sort of thing?"

"What d'you know most about?"

Zara considered the matter. "Well, really nothing," she said, appalled at the void thus suddenly revealed.

"Most encouraging," said Cerberus, "I'll give you a pound a page for it. The majority of my contributors think they know everything."

Upstairs, in the great bedroom where a log fire accentuated the cheerfulness of perfectly laundered chintzes, Zara contemplated change. In decency, she felt she could hardly go on working for Universal Ltd. She was getting stale. Sometimes, of course, the office enthusiasm caught her, for she was impressionable, and galvanised her into the production of a terse and singularly effective paragraph, but, for the last year, her "stuff had been tired." During the preceding winter, it had seemed a long way from Shepherd's Market to Lower Regent Street and surely it had rained nearly every day.

When she was twenty, Zara had felt that if she could work she would be happy. All through her life she had been convinced that marriage with someone she loved would mean a state of absolute satisfaction, but now at twenty-seven she was beginning to wonder

if either happiness or content were within grasp of the congeries of dissidents who lived, moved and had their being inside her brain and body.

Perhaps if she could write, she would find a modicum of satisfaction.

In this mood, she told Christopher-Carlyon, who was always immensely interested and a little lost at Widelands, that she intended to leave Universal Ltd. "For the last year our connection has been morganatic," she said, and made him laugh.

In this atmosphere of space and effortless comfort, with everything in its inevitable place, where it could best serve the convenience of the guests whom the house took pleasure in spoiling, it was easy to add, "and we shall be poorer than ever. You realise that, don't you?"

At Widelands such a remark meant nothing at all. Zara was even able to add "not one single extravagance till I become a best seller."

"Heaven forbid!" ejaculated Christopher-Carlyon, who read little but biography and that little so recondite that it was generally published at the author's expense.

After dinner, Jane made Zara come upstairs with her. "I've broken something. There was an ominous crack in the middle of that poem which called itself a soufflé. The cook ought to be canonised. The halt and the blind would certainly lay aside their crutches after such food in order to sing the Te Deum of repletion. Isn't it awful the way we make gods of our insides?"

She chattered as they went up one of the white,

uncarpeted staircases which rose like twin breakers from the ocean of white hallways, but she switched off her nonsense the instant the bedroom door closed behind them.

"Zara, you look very tired. What's the matter?"

"Nothing," said her sister and, for the moment, she felt it.

But Jane was persistent. By no means unaware of Christopher's charm, which was irritating to her because of the unconscious claim it made on everyone's forbearance, she knew that he was not the right person for Zara and had omitted all mention of this fact since the marriage made it superfluous.

For months she had realised that some quality in Zara was wasting. She was more tolerant and more indolent than she used to be. Her perceptions were clouded. With the exception of those which concerned Christopher, things didn't matter so much.

Jane was quite content with her mess of pottage, which she found excellent, but, in spite of her continual assaults on it, she had always imagined that Zara would keep intact her birthright. Here she was, in some mysterious danger of losing it and without the satisfaction of acquiring a good price in exchange. Jane was not subtle with words. She told her sister that she was becoming a materialist without the justification of success. "Christopher has done something to you, I don't know what, I'm no good at psychoanalysis."

Zara smiled. So the mangle had done something to Jane too. It was a case of the pot and the kettle.

The elder of the two sisters reflected that successful marriage was bound to iron out the creases of individuality. "Ye twain shall be one flesh" translated into practical common sense meant that two divergent and often inimical natures should be put through the same mangle and reduced to the same condition of adaptability. Marriage was a state of putting up with things and, when you came to think of it, it was appalling what a lot you could put up with, but a considerable shrinkage was inevitable. The things you said in the indecent mental familiarity of marriage were awful. First of all they were daggers and then they were knitting-needles and last of all they were no more than blunted pins which you didn't notice at all. There is nothing so thickening to the epidermis as a successful marriage. Husband and wife go on forgiving such an inordinate number of minor insults that they lose all respect for themselves and for each other. Thank heavens, thought Zara, Christopher and I haven't got to the stage of being rude without noticing. She felt then that she couldn't bear it if Christopher-Carlyon's illumined chivalry failed her. He might walk out of the flat in a rage, but he would never rant. She had seen John with an ugly line grooved at the corner of his mouth and his whole face so sodden with rage that it looked debauched, yet Jane hadn't minded a bit. She had submitted to being abused like a street-walker and had called her complicity humouring the male. One ought to mind such scenes. They stripped one naked.

Zara, still grateful for Christopher-Carlyon, whose

manners were exquisite whenever he happened to be in the same world as his companions, remembered that he had not yet tried deliberately to hurt her.

Jane was speaking. "You'd better leave the flat and come to me in Park Lane. It's very quiet at the back and you can sleep all morning." She thought her sister needed sleep and wondered if she could attack the un-eugenic aspect of the Jacobean bed.

Zara broke in with "I'm leaving Universal Ltd. That'll make all the difference in the world. So far writing has been about the most oppressive thing I've done. Now I'm going to try turning myself inside out and, even if I don't achieve 'a literary masterpiece' equal to the sort of thing that witch-in-miniature brews" (she referred to the Authoress), "foolscap will be a confessional instead of the iron maiden of Nuremberg—you remember that particularly repressive form of torture?"

Zara was pleasantly excited, and everything was so large. Christopher could sleep in the dressing-room, into which the whole of their flat could have been packed, and there would be no danger of drowning the possibility of breakfast if one splashed too much in the bath.

"It would be lovely to come to you, Jane. You know how I like wallowing in your disgustingly perfect houses. What marvels you've done to them. One doesn't notice the plumbing any more. But I can't desert Christopher-Carlyon. He needs me and the worst of it is he's beginning to know it."

A year ago Zara would have said "the best of it is," yet she was still very much in love. There were mo-

ments when she did not know whether the torment of her husband's presence were not greater than the torment of his absence, but there were others when they achieved a friendliness in which their thoughts were common.

"I can't leave Christopher," she repeated, "I've never known anyone else so well. It's almost dreadful the way two mis-shaped pieces of ourselves belong to each other, but he thinks they're the whole of us."

Jane wondered if it were true.

During this particular visit, Zara realised how much Christopher-Carlyon disliked the Jew. It was an instinctive antipathy and only its object could have explained the reason for it. When the girl announced her intention of motoring into Winchester with him, Christopher looked at her as if she had expressed a predilection for slugs. "How can you stand the man?" he asked, and Zara saw him sniffing a pierced golden ball, full of perfume, while he ordered the extermination of a ghetto.

"You don't belong to this century at all," she told him and went to Winchester in the Rolls. But her pleasure was spoiled.

"It was such fun finding you again," she said to the man beside her. "I hadn't realised how much I missed you."

"I should like to be able to say the same about you in relation to the office."

Zara turned to him with disarming sincerity. "Has my work been so bad?"

The Jew nodded. "It's a pity. You might have made something of it."

"It seems to me," said the girl with sudden depression, "that I'm not likely to make good in anything."

"You don't concentrate," said the Jew, thinking of advertising.

"But I do," contradicted Zara, thinking of marriage. She told her companion that she was going to try journalism.

"There's nothing in it unless you've got a name," he said, "or, of course, a title—that covers a multitude of sins, committed by someone else."

Zara found herself saying "I've got to make money," and, without any suggestion of intimacy, the Jew retorted, "You can go on making it at Universal Ltd. if you like."

Zara shook her head, "I haven't any more ideas. Concentrated domesticity has clogged them. You would be giving me a salary for dis-services rendered."

"I will, if you like. I'll pay all your debts and give you the £600 a year as an allowance."

Zara stared at him dumbfounded. Leaning back in the opposite corner, he was obviously appreciating a view of the New Forest. When he pointed out a group of silver birches as resembling the work of a new Dutch painter, she thought he must have been joking.

"Why only £600?" she asked with intent to defraud the moment of any possible seriousness.

"Let me know how much you think you could live on without worrying and I'll tell my bankers to pay it quarterly into your account," said the Jew in the sort of voice in which the average man says, "Tell me what play you want to see and I'll get tickets."

"One of us is obviously mad," said Zara, "and if you happen to be serious, it must be you."

The Jew smiled. "You will never make a business woman. Here is a perfectly sound offer with no conditions attached. You need never see me. Your husband dislikes me too much to make it advisable. In fact, all you've got to do is to forget the source of your income."

"And what are you going to get out of it?"

The man reflected. He might have answered that the money meant nothing to him, but it would not have been exact, for though, like all his race, he was excessively generous, he was conscious of the value as of the responsibility of money. Unlike the Gentile, the Hebrew does not bury his talent and think he has rendered sufficient service to his kind. He might, with a measure of truth, have replied that Zara meant a great deal to him, but he wanted her to accept his offer.

"I think of it as an investment," he said at last.

There was a pause. With the town in sight, the man added, "If you had chosen to live fully, you would have needed no help from me or anyone else, but your only genius is for life, Zara. You have none for business. You will not make a success of writing, so long as you have to worry about what you can earn. You have a certain facility of expression. It might develop." His thoughts ran on to the moment when she would have done with Christopher-Carlyon. Her life with him was in swaddling bands.

Zara caught at his first sentence.

"What d'you mean by living fully?" She remem-

bered that Jane had made the same sort of remark, but with a different purpose. The man beside her would suggest nothing so ephemeral as "the deep-end or a week-end." She laughed and, in answer to the Jew's raised eyebrows, explained, "You and Jane are prophets of different creeds, but you use the same ritual."

"I'm sure we don't advocate the same methods," returned the man who admired certain qualities in Jane and despised the use she made of them.

The car swung into the High Street and the chauffeur asked for directions. The Jew suggested that they might look at the old furniture shops and, while they wandered between musty relics, to each of which his knowledge attributed a history, Zara had no opportunity to continue the discussion.

Back in the car, with a piece of old Spode in her hands, she asked, "How can one live fully, unless one is prepared for smashes?"

"Nine tenths of the opinions with which we hamper our intelligence ought to be smashed."

They were passing under the cathedral and Zara looked up at its spire. It was like a sword thrust hilt-deep into the earth.

The Jew expressed her thoughts. "It was convictions not opinions which created so much beauty. How many are left in the world to-day?"

"But you do not believe—"

The Jew interrupted. "In the uttermost need of man which has created religion? Of course, I do. Mine is the older faith, on which yours and many others are based, but the origin of them all is the same. We cannot get away from our hunger for immortality.

That masterpiece was man's challenge to heaven, fruit of his conviction that God must recognise his superiority to the beasts."

"You speak as if man made his own God."

"The Christian God is certainly man-made, in his own image, out of his own understanding. He is expected to know what is cricket and what isn't. Out of the best qualities of humánity, you have created a godhead, the infinite out of the finite—it is a joke fit for scientists."

The man spoke as if he had no audience. He was following his own thoughts, but Zara probed them with, "What of your own God?"

The Jew looked at her with the sombre eyes of a people which has faced, unmoved, the martyrdom of centuries. He had no need to explain his faith, for he was part of it.

"Some day, perhaps you will know Him," he said, and regretted the sentence, uttered in all simplicity, when he saw its effect on Zara. The girl was frightened, as she had been, long ago, when he spoke of authority in a London grill-room.

"You are afraid of living," he said sternly, "and you do not know what it is. Your feeling for Hilary is sentiment. It is not life."

"I ask you for bread and you give me—no certainly not a stone, that is something solid. You give me unutterable emptiness."

Zara had begun lightly, but the shaft had gone home.

"I offered you some hundreds a year. You will find that quite solid. Please, Zara, be sensible instead of conventional. Accept it." He sat quite still in his

corner, withdrawn from her, mentally as well as physically. The girl thought that his strength lay in this quality of stillness. Jane had it too, but hers gave the impression of quiescent muscular tissue. She would not waste effort.

"Of course I can't take it," said Zara, and she meant it so fully that she did not trouble to explain. It would have been utterly impossible for her to accept.

The Jew understood and was sorry. He would have liked to make things easier for her, as he did for his mother and for those of the numerous connections who were dependent on him, but he was never over insistent.

"Let me know if you change your mind," he said, "the offer will always be open."

It was only then that Zara realised the necessity for thanks.

"It is the most generous thing in the world," she began, "only you would have thought of it. How can I thank you?"

"Don't," said the Jew. "Tell me of your literary prospects."

Zara found that, by the time they reached the park gates, she had told him a good deal about herself.

## CHAPTER XIX

THE summer was long and hot. By the end of it Zara's nerves were in shreds. There were days when she had not had enough to eat and a procession of nights during which she had not slept. She did not complain. It had become a matter of profound conviction with her that Christopher must not be worried, yet she would have been annoyed had she been told that here was her mother's point of view with regard to John Wincombe.

That summer Zara lost her sense of proportion studying the ten different results which represented ten consecutive attempts to add up the same column of figures. In spite of exquisitely expressed resolutions, Christopher-Carlyon could not resist aesthetic temptation. Consequently Zara found it impossible to adjust the hiatus between an income arbitrarily reduced to half and an expenditure which mounted with the temperature. She could not bear to spoil Christopher's pleasure by continually discouraging his suggestions for their mutual pleasure. She felt, when she saw his smile fade, that she was gradually losing him as a playmate and he was the most enchanting one in the world. But the situation was becoming desperate and in September when Zara realised the mess she was making of propinquity she suggested that they should part for a few weeks. Christopher's radiance at the thought of un-

diluted Maurden, for he had not yet been able to take a holiday, added the final touch to his wife's misery. Harassed by innumerable apprehensions which she kept rigidly to herself, Zara was clumsy enough to show she was at the end of her tether without explaining the reason for it. Christopher-Carlyon thought she was ceasing to care for him.

On the day of her departure, he made an effort to recapture their intimacy. "I shall hate being away from you," he said ruefully, "but living with you in this flat is like being shut up with a whole company of strangers. I didn't know there were so many of you."

"And all of them disagreeable," added his wife with a smile which did no more than stiffen her lips.

"Not quite all of them," said Christopher and kissed her left hand, which he thought the more beautiful of the two.

He took her to the station, bought her a first class ticket and, as the train was starting, dropped into her lap a box of particularly expensive cigarettes, which she had once said she liked.

"You are the most adorable thing in the world," he said, with a smile that was heart-breaking because it was still so full of illusion, "and it's terribly nice of me to let you go."

Zara agreed that it was and wondered whether he had paid for the cigarettes.

John's house in Sussex was delightful. Here Jane had been more than clever. Zara, entering its panelled hall after the noise and smell of London, felt as if she had reached harbour. The kaleidoscope of streets quivering in petrol-tainted heat was still impressed up-

on her being. When she shut her eyes, she saw a procession of taxis with open exhausts, she heard the expostulations of sweating drivers, of creditors who lived too near for comfort and of the apoplectic valet who had ceased to function with the rising mercury. She opened them to see Jane in white behind a polished tea-table on which nothing had dared to suggest even the possibility of melting.

Zara wondered if her nose were as shiny as it felt. She sank into an arm-chair without spot or blemish. For a moment she wondered dully if there were any single commodity, liquid or solid, that she had not upset in the flat. Then she gave herself up to the peace of the low-roofed hall, where rugs from Ispahan were pools of faded splendour and sunlight was spilled through the coats of arms in the West-window like wine out of a press. She was unutterably tired.

Jane realised it, and she hardly talked at all while she gave her sister tea that bore no resemblance to stewed hay. It suggested fields in bloom and coolies in blue loin-cloths, their pigtails tucked up under cart-wheel hats. After her third cup, Zara realised that she was unjustifiably shabby. She looked at the frock Jane had chosen for her. It had suited her so well in the shop, but one of the sleeves was cracked and she had been too busy to mend it, or was it too lazy? For the last month the solitary maid who did for the flats in more senses than one, had been incapacitated by hay fever and, as she was inclined to drop one of Christopher-Carlyon's most fragile possessions whenever she sneezed, Zara had become housemaid as well as cook. Not till then did she realise how much the flat

contained and, if each piece of glass were clouded by anything but the dreams of the artist who created it, Christopher was unhappy. Surreptitiously he would search for a clean duster.

The girl sighed but turned it into a smile as she caught her sister's eye.

"You haven't put it on right," said Jane severely, "the belt ought to be tighter and what have you done with the scarf?"

"It lost itself," said Zara. "Things do in the most miraculous way. I believe the flat's haunted. Let me have several baths, undiluted by to-morrow's provisions. Then I shan't do such damage to your innermost feelings."

Jane took her upstairs to a room redolent of lavender and roses and "Le Cri" bath-salts. The windows were wide open. A bee droned stupidly against a pane.

"Heavenly," said Zara, taking a deep breath. "It's worth every moment of a summer in London to have this at the end of it. I shan't go away till I've exorcised a depression which is not me. I feel possessed and at the same time appallingly null and void. I think everything in me is upside down and is having someone else's sensations at the most unsuitable moments. Oh, Jane, what sheets! and blankets to match! You are an abandoned woman. Well, I've warned you. I'm going to get rid of the alien who is making hay of my generally equable temper, before I stir from this spot."

But she did not, because, after a month of irritated languor, she discovered, with Jane's assistance, that she was going to have a child.

Her first reaction was one of terror. What on earth would they feed it on? "Jane, you'll have to adopt it. It's sure to be a girl. Does John like girls? In any case, you'd look charming with a very well-dressed one clinging to your manicured fingers—that last polish is like blood. If you see it suddenly without warning, it has the appearance of an 'orrible accident."

Zara stopped suddenly. They were sitting on the terrace, sheltered from the wind which tumbled over the downs by beeches just beginning to redden. Autumn was in the air, but it lingered courteously, unwilling to intrude upon the last rout of summer.

Zara looked much better than when she had left London and Christopher-Carlyon. The lines had been smoothed out of her face and more slowly the same process was being applied to her spirit. Jane listened and asked no questions. Consequently her sister had talked herself free of the inhibitions which had been congested by the necessity for tact.

"Christopher will be pleased, I must write to him at once. Telegrams at Maurden are the most barbaric affairs, distorted by the telephone and the village post-mistress who has a squint and a stutter."

Slowly, Zara began to feel pleased. So far she had not been of much use to Christopher-Carlyon, but this was something tangible which she could give him. If only it were a son! He adored small boys, especially if they had fair hair and wore brilliant scarlet ties to contrast with it. Zara's lips softened. She was remembering Christopher's expression when he lifted a four-year-old cousin onto his knee and looked at her,

flushed and delighted, over the child's head. There had been a challenge in his eyes.

"Stop thinking of Christopher." ordered Jane. "You overdo it. You simply don't give the man a chance."

"So far I have given him lots of things he doesn't want and precious little that he does."

But Jane was not to be deflected from her purpose.

"Well, for the next few months you can jolly well think of yourself, and you can stay here. Christopher can come down for week-ends."

Zara wondered if Maurden or the prospect of a son would rank more important in her husband's mind.

But Jane was determined to be personal.

"Do you want to have it?" she asked.

"Have what?" gaped Zara, nine-tenths of her with Christopher.

"Oh, don't be an idiot—this baby, of course—there's a marvellous electric man who's quite painless."

Her sister stared. It would be murdering something of Christopher. Then she was amused. It was so like Jane to be prepared for all emergencies.

"You'd better think it over," continued the cool young person in blue, "you couldn't possibly keep a child in that flat, unless you hung it out of the window in a cage, and then it would be rained upon. Of course you can dump it here—indefinitely."

She was about to touch pertinently on the question of money, but Zara interrupted. "Of course I want it enormously—for Christopher. Personally, I think it's a distasteful business. Had God been a woman, he would have arranged things so much better."

She wondered what Christopher would feel when

her body lost its shape. He so admired the lines of her. Physical blemishes revolted him. What an unnecessarily humiliating business it was and how could successive generations of women have blinded themselves to its outrageousness by calling their deformity beautiful. For the first time in her life, Zara was sharply conscious of what the strength and shapeliness of her body meant to her. Until the last few weeks, it had never let her down. She had been able to count on it for speed and endurance. Now it would be heavy and inert, a mass of intimately revolted flesh, helpless in the hands of strangers. Zara shuddered. She hated being touched.

It was some minutes before she realised all that Jane, in well chosen sentences, had been offering her.

"You do see, don't you? My allowance really is a nuisance. I don't know what to do with it. I can't buy more than seven frocks a week and, if John likes them, he generally doubles my order—rather like contract-bridge, or is it the other way round?" Jane was nervous.

"You're a complete angel, but don't let's talk about money. For once, I am actually trying to forget it. I'll always come to you when I'm desperate—you're the only person I could go to—but don't let's be practical yet. I don't think I can wait to write to Christopher. I must try and telephone."

Zara was on her feet, defiantly lithe, with a flame on each cheekbone, and Jane let her go. She would talk to her brother-in-law herself. It was time somebody made him understand.

But this would have been beyond anyone save pos-

sibly Merlin. Christopher, receiving a garbled impression that Zara needed him and fearing that she was ill, dropped the rake with which he had been clearing weeds from the pond and to which he had clung during the disruptive telephonic conversation, and, without waiting to change, ordered a car from the nearest town.

By the time it arrived, he had packed a curious collection of necessities into a very old bag, and was waiting on the bridge, in the muddiest of grey flannel trousers, soaked to the knees, and a shirt open at the neck. At the last moment, he ran back to fetch his coat.

The car was full of cylinders and other reasons for speed. It made short work of the miles into Sussex and Christopher-Carlyon reached his brother-in-law's door in time to change for dinner. At least, he would have been in time, had not Zara met him on the stairs and taken him into her room.

"You're not ill, then?" he said, delighted to be with her and incurious as to why she had sent for him. In a breath he told her how charming she looked—in a frock of Jane's—how much he had missed her and what he was doing at Maurden. The latter subject threatened to engross him, until Zara caught his arm and shook it with some force.

"Leave Maurden at once. I've got something much more important to talk about."

Christopher kissed her as if he'd just remembered that it was usual.

"Darling," said Zara and, at that moment, she was so pleased about it that she did the latest one-step sideways. "I'm going to have a baby and, if you're very

particularly nice to me, I'll let you have some of it to play with."

She still spoke of "it," but, to Christopher, there was only one possible sex for his child. "Zara—" he began, and stopped perforce because the tide which suffused his face, reddening it from chin to brow, made his eyes water and his lips uncertain. For Zara it was a repetition of the scene in the church, when, an incredibly long time ago, in another life, she had said "Yes. Let's—" But this time Christopher held her in arms which were unexpectedly human and he wouldn't let her go.

He seemed to expect her to say a great deal more, but there wasn't anything else in her mind, except that it was a perfectly lovely present to be able to give Christopher and if only things went better, it would be great fun to have some bit of him that she could understand because she had made it herself.

"We'll be appallingly late," she told him at last. "and John hates being so impolite to the soup as to keep it waiting. Do hurry."

But, when she saw his face, boyishly excited and without any of the shadows for which she had so often reproached herself, she had to go to him again and tell him how absurdly delightful he was. Sunburned and intensely alive, so that he looked like a young Olympian, unconscious of the unaccustomed earth on which he trod, he lingered in the doorway turning with the swift eagerness which signalised his movements whenever he was happy, to say very softly, "Zara, I love you. Won't it be gorgeous? You must be as marvellously glad as I am."

"Go and dress," said Zara, but her expression satisfied him.

Jane had her talk with Christopher-Carlyon. She took him into the garden one morning and told him that neither his wife nor his child could live on air. She was exaggeratedly tactful but she managed in the course of half an hour to outrage most of Christopher's sensibilities.

"Is it possible that you're offering me money?" he asked. "You must be mad."

At that moment Jane understood why her sister had married him. In these days of artificial heating, it must be an amazing experience to live with fire. Still, she continued in her well meant effort to quench the element of which she was suddenly aware. Christopher-Carlyon became furious. He wanted to walk out of the house, hatless, but a new responsibility held him.

"I think we'd better forget every single thing you've said," he told an exasperated Jane, "I am quite capable of looking after my wife." He thought how wonderful it would be when he could add "and my son."

"So far, you've nearly killed her," retorted Jane.

Christopher looked at her as if she were a stranger. "I don't think you know what you're talking about. How could you?" and he allowed his glance to rest, for a moment, on the inadequate presence of John, redder than usual after a tussle with his bailiff. Christopher-Carlyon was not so defenceless as he appeared to be. Jane told him so and he laughed, but there was malice in his eyes. "When I do strike, you will be quite aware of it," he said.

Jane considered the warning had been wasted, but

it had far-reaching results. Christopher found it hard to believe that money could possibly matter so much. It was outrageous. He remembered, with some satisfaction, that Zara had said it didn't matter at all, but she might have changed her mind. Women did. The only thing, then, was to make money. He tried to remember a tip that his friend in the city had given him—artificial something and bound to treble within the year.

Two days later Christopher went up to London, and withdrew what remained of his four thousand pounds from a safe 5 per cent investment. After a consultation with his friend, who was an optimist, he ventured it all on margin in a speculative American stock which had already startled Wall Street.

Delighted with his perspicacity, he returned to the house in Sussex and was particularly charming to Zara, so that for several consecutive days, she was happier than she had imagined possible.

"Something awful must be going to happen," she told Jane, "I wish I had a private idol to whom I could make sacrifices, it might stave off disaster."

Her sister laughed. She had taken the law into her own hands and instructed a lawyer to collect and settle every account owed by Mr. or Mrs. Christopher Hilary. The size of the cheque she had to draw in consequence was surprising even to Jane, who was accustomed to figures, but she said nothing about it to her sister.

## CHAPTER XX

CHRISTOPHER-CARLYON found himself unexpectedly lonely at the flat.

"How could you have thought it small?" he wrote to Zara. "Without you, it's immense and void. You have become an obsession, so that I am furious with you and say to myself—it's ridiculous, why can't I get that woman out of my mind."

The natural result of this letter was that Zara went back to Shepherd's Market and for a week or two life ran smoothly. Christopher's spirits rocketed with his American stock. At the end of October he could have sold at a profit, but his broker advised him, "If you hold on, you'll make a fortune. Don't worry about fluctuations."

November was so blanketed in fog that Christopher was always losing either the Brewery or the flat, and Zara, with a cold which threatened to become permanent, was immured between walls which seemed to be narrowing with the appalling weather. Jane tried to induce her to return to Sussex where the downs were still faintly golden and hoary with the first frosts. Mrs. Wincombe made persistent pilgrimages to Shepherd's Market and gave the sort of advice which, being physical and disagreeable, had the effect of reducing the future Timothy-Anne from a de-

lightfully capricious spirit full of amusing possibilities to a body whose advent must necessarily be attended by the utmost publicity of pain.

It was Christopher-Carlyon who suggested the dual name.

"I think it's wicked to tell a woman she's got to have sons. It must be so bad for the child and so disappointing for her," he insisted with quaint wisdom, but Timothy-Anne was going to shoot and play cricket. His school was settled. He would go to a certain house at Eton. Zara laughed at him. "And if it's a girl?" Christopher, checked in full flight, remembered his principles.

The end of November saw a bear attack on Wall Street. A record number of shares changed hands. Speculative counters lost an incredible number of points. A Panic threatened and the committee of the American Stock Exchange met to consider the advisability of a moratorium.

It was so sudden that Christopher didn't quite realise what had happened. An interview with his broker opened his eyes, but the optimistic friend arranged cover. "It is only a matter of waiting," he said. "Things are bound to go up again. Forget about your little flutter for a couple of months."

But Christopher could not do this. It haunted him during the fog-bound days and, at last, when his shares had fallen beyond the possibility of his ever being able to pay for them, he gave up looking at a paper. Each post might bring the letter he feared. He studied the flaps of the envelopes before opening them. For the first time in his life he was up against

a reality which his imagination could do nothing to improve. Unless a miracle happened, he must go bankrupt. The fastidious spirit of Christopher-Carlyon shrivelled under the realisation of his own folly, but he said nothing to Zara.

She knew that he was depressed, but she thought it was the fog which blurred the outlines of their life so that they seemed to be talking to each other from a great distance. She did her best to cheer him and the autumn dragged away in a series of minor discomforts. Christopher had his usual bout of 'flu, and, oppressed by the sense of impending disaster, he made no effort to fight it. Zara had to wage his battle for him and the subsequent exhaustion reacted on her nerves. Watching Christopher drifting about the flat, touching things delicately, his eyes vacant and his head turning instinctively at every sound on the stairs, she felt that he had no right to be so miserable. "You look as if you expected to be arrested at any moment," she told him. "What are you listening for?"

Christopher wondered what she would say if he replied, "for the bottom to fall out of the world." He felt just like that and he magnified his own personal tragedy till it achieved the dignity of Waterloo. But he was not lacking in courage. He managed to laugh at his wife as he said, "I'm waiting for something to happen. This is just the sort of day for it."

"Then it would be something excessively disagreeable," said Zara and she got up heavily to make tea. Christopher helped her. He was gentle and considerate, but he seemed to have shrunk physically as well as mentally. "It's so terribly cold," he would repeat

when his wife could scarcely stand the stuffiness of the room.

When Zara spoke of the spring she came up against a blank wall. Christopher's imagination halted. He could not see beyond his St. Helena and it was rock-bound amidst seas of hostile publicity. The optimistic friend continued to telephone, but his voice was less assured. Once he asked if Hilary couldn't scrape up a few extra thousands. He was pretty well dipped himself. Christopher humbled himself to explain the exact situation. The friend whistled his chagrin. "Oh Lord, if that's the case we'll have to go into things."

Christopher agreed in the tone of an emperor faced by a rebellious Privy Council.

The friend hesitated over his responsibility. He was a decent sort and he'd meant to do a pal a good turn. "Well, don't do anything in a hurry. We'll hang on till the next settlement," he said.

That night, Christopher took Zara to a play and, while he managed to laugh at the artificial comedy which he scarcely noticed, he felt that if the earth would conveniently open or a bus take a fancy to run over him, he would be grateful to the Providence he now profoundly mistrusted. They met Robert in the foyer and the diplomat-dramatist was shocked. "What's happened to your young man?" he asked his sister. "He's looking pretty seedy." Privately he wondered what the fellow'd been up to.

Zara sighed as she watched Christopher who had left them to look for a taxi. Oblivious of the crowd, he stood on the edge of the pavement, biting his lip and staring at nothing. Robert took them on to sup-

per. It was hard luck on Zara, he reflected and, when he saw her face in repose, at a moment when she imagined nobody was looking at her, he realised that there was more at stake than he imagined.

In truth, Zara was bewildered. Hitherto she had always understood the trend of Christopher's errantry. She had been able to follow wherever his wildest fancies led, but now he had gone away altogether. She felt as if a door had closed between them and she did not know why.

The Night-Club was crowded. From a corner table, the Authoress waved delicately. Cerberus was with her and, commenting on Zara's changed appearance, he protested. "That woman could write if she had time to think about it."

The Authoress was mildly regretful that she had introduced the two. "I thought it would be so amusing," she explained, "but the last thing I contemplated was a wedding." She did not add that the prospective child was a piling of Ossa on Pelion in the way of disaster, but she was of the opinion that life could be arranged to suit each individual taste. It was a matter of forethought and intelligence. Zara had shown neither one nor the other. "What is this thing called love?" played the band and the Authoress smiled. "A patent medicine," she said, "and that girl has taken an overdose."

Cerberus frowned between shaggy eyebrows.

On the other side of the room the Well-Known Woman remarked to the Explorer that girls so often went to pieces after marriage. "They lose grip," she said, as if matrimony were a golf-club.

The Explorer felt superior. She knew that she wore well and her own marriage had been particularly successful, perhaps because it was ventilated by absence. She had an obscure prejudice against men, because they did the things she wanted to do so much better and more easily than she could ever hope to do them, and because they admired in her all the things she hoped she wasn't. Therefore she said Christopher would be an impossible husband and she wondered how Zara could stand him.

The Interesting Woman walked across the room in a red dress that curled round her like a flame. Her lovely head was held high. She always gave the impression that she was proud to be with her friends. Zara's heart felt less like soft lead churned by something sharp. "You must come down to Widelands tomorrow, all three of you. I can't do without you," said the Interesting Woman, and they went, because it was so nice to be wanted.

Later on Zara thought of this week-end in the great Adam house, with its air of being gently detached from the transient life it sheltered, as the moment of expectant stillness before a storm.

Christopher and Zara went back to London alone, on the Sunday night in order that the Brewery might be appeased by promptitude the following morning. Christopher had received a letter from his brokers on the Friday, but he had not opened it. It had remained in his breast pocket during the week-end and he read it, as he intended, as soon as the train drew out of the station. The contents were even worse than he had expected. He looked blankly across the carriage, his

mouth a little open, his body motionless, but he did not see Zara and he didn't hear her till she had repeated her troubled queries half a dozen times. "Christopher, what's the matter? I must know what's the matter!"

She was frightened by her husband's expression. His glance shifted with an effort, as if he had difficulty in focussing it. "Eh?" His lips moved, and Zara, thoroughly alarmed, threw herself across the carriage and caught his arm. "Tell me about it."

She pressed closely against him as if she would warm them both, for the temperature in the third class carriage was arctic, and the light inadequate. Christopher seemed to be unaware of his wife's presence, and while she waited for him to recover the sense of it, Zara heard the grinding of the axles and the drum of wheels on the metals. She felt sick.

"I didn't want to tell you," said Christopher at last, "I hoped you'd never have to know."

Zara braced herself. She thought of the Faun, condemned to six months' terrible knowledge with an isolation ward at the end of it. The pressure of her body was a challenge. She would not let Christopher be hurt. There must be some way of shielding him with her own health.

"I've lost every penny," said Christopher with the anguish of a child whose money-box has been stolen and, for a moment, Zara was speechless, numbed by the quick reaction.

"Is that all?" she asked and the relief was so immense that it brought tears into her eyes. "I was so

afraid," she muttered, hugging all of Christopher that he would concede, "I was so terribly afraid."

"But you don't understand," persisted the man and he told her clearly and slowly how he had invested his four thousand on margin and how his friend had lent him cover. "It's all gone, every penny of it and another £5,000 as well."

"What £5,000?" asked Zara stupidly and Christopher continued his explanations like a small boy trying to make his elders understand something that is terribly important to him.

"I owe my brokers rather over five thousand and I haven't got five pounds," he concluded.

Zara was too stunned by a mixture of relief and bewilderment to be immediately responsive. It was impossible for her to understand how anyone could be so stupid. She felt as if someone had hit her on the head with a bludgeon, but the stupefaction was nothing to the pain of the previous days, when she had feared that the tragedy of the Faun might be re-enacted with Christopher as the victim.

Aching with the cold and surreptitiously rubbing her hands for she felt, at that moment, she oughtn't to notice it, she told the bloodless figure beside her that it didn't matter in the least.

It was like talking to an automaton. Zara, conscious of the rhythm of the pistons and feeling as if the most intimate portion of herself were helpless under them, made a great effort. "Darling, you're exaggerating most terribly. It isn't as important as all that. Why, I thought it was so infinitely worse."

She clung to him, kissing his shoulder, impressing

on him her nearness and her love. "How can it matter in the long run? We'll find the money somehow. There's Maurden—"

"It's not entailed," interrupted Christopher, "and, if my father knew about this, he'd cut me off altogether."

The cold was penetrating. Zara felt it closing round her heart. A smell of stale tobacco permeated the carriage. The windows were dank with mist. The girl began to feel physically inert. For the first time she was conscious of the child as a separate burden. It was hostile to her. It absorbed her strength and she needed it all for Christopher. If only she were free and strong. Then she could prevail against his depression. But her spirit was dulled. It was as if she were tied by some quivering physical cord to another element heavily quiescent and yet voracious. She was defeated by her own body which no more belonged to her.

Zara, clenching her hands, fighting herself as much as Christopher, strove for the spiritual clarity that had once been hers. At that moment she loathed men and the things for which they were responsible. The asceticism of her mind was revolted because she could not ignore her body. It was sick. It was obsessed. She could not escape from it. Her personality was not sufficiently strong to reject the claim of the future.

"Christopher, darling, I can't help you. It's Timothy-Anne—" she cried, utterly incoherent, and the man understood.

"It was all for him," he said gripping her hands and hurting them. "I wanted us to be rich, so that

you needn't worry any more. I know you worry. I do myself sometimes, but not for long. When anything nice happens, I forget, but you wallow in it."

Zara, thankful to find some sort of intimacy reestablished, asked him, while the moment seemed propitious, "Have you any plans? Can you think of any possible way of paying?"

She made a mental inventory of their possessions. There was no potential gold-mine among them. It flashed across her brain that Jane was out of reach. Aboard John's latest possession, a yacht with an abnormal cruising range, she was on her way to the East Indies. Suddenly, her heart began to beat quickly and heavily, so that she felt as if the wheels of the train were in her chest. Her voice broke in her throat and all she could do was to smile blindly at Christopher while he went on talking. Zara was frightened. She wondered if she were going to faint and leaning back against the hideous upholstery, very still and white, she summoned all her force to repel what she felt was the insidious attack of her body. How she disliked it.

When her brain cleared, she became aware of Christopher's helplessness and she touched his hand. Till the train ran into the slums between small, grim houses, layered one slice of poverty upon another equally abject, she talked to him about what they would do, and how her father would help them, ending every bout of consolation with, "It's not nearly so terrible as you think! Why it's happened to almost everyone we know at some time or other," till at last Christopher said to her, hopeful, and half-ashamed of it,

"D'you really think we can find some way out of it?"

Zara, white and stiff, smiled at him. "Of course we can," she lied and, thereafter, while he relived for her the months of strain, describing vividly, even brilliantly, his alternating moods when hope fought erratically against despair, she stared into the future as if it were mapped on the opposite wall. The vision was not reassuring. Her father would not relish the rôle assigned to him. Any help he was likely to give would come too late to be of practical use. Zara found a grim amusement in picturing John Wincombe's expression. Could he have had his way, he would have included gamblers among the mentally deficient and locked them up in an asylum. To do him justice, he was no more capable of raising several thousands at a moment's notice than they were themselves.

Zara sighed, while she told Christopher how splendid he had been. "Why did you bear it all alone? Why didn't you share it with me?" she asked, without bitterness. The thing that had happened to them was too big for recrimination. What she said was true. Christopher had been amazingly and quite unnecessarily courageous. The girl realised what his silence must have cost him. It was no use harping on its futility.

Zara, considering as many aspects of the problem as her misery could grasp, realised that without the interest on Christopher's small capital, they would have under four hundred pounds a year on which to live. That was eight pounds a week. Well, half the world existed on infinitely less. The flat must go, but they would not live at Maurden. Zara feared the castle as

if it were a personal enemy. Then she remembered the five thousand they owed. All the apprehensions of her childhood came back to her in full force. One cell of her brain, remote and bleak, told her that it was she who must discover a solution or make one. Christopher depended on her. She must not fail him at the worst moment of his life, but logic was swamped by unreasoning terror. When the train jolted into Waterloo, Zara was stark with an accumulation of inhibited fears, the stronger for their years of suppression. Life had got her down, but she did not tell this to Christopher-Carlyon.

## CHAPTER XXI

INEVITABLY Zara went to the Jew. There was nothing else to be done. She left it to the last possible moment, and then, without saying anything to Christopher, she made an appointment to meet him for tea at the Carlton Club.

"It's quiet in that sepulchre they call the drawing-room," said the voice on the telephone and Zara found illogical reassurance in its depth and in its even quality. The Jew was never disturbed. The storms which troubled the surface on which other men sprawled and fought, had no effect on him. Fathoms deep, thought Zara, while she walked through St. James's. Her heart beat uncomfortably fast. Her hands were so cold that she could not feel the finger-tips.

A general impression of warmth and padded pinkness met her on the threshold of the ladies' withdrawing-room. Then the Jew had both her hands in his and, in that moment, unconsciously, she ceded some of her burden.

"Tea or a cocktail? What'll you have? The hot buttered toast is quite decent."

They were sitting on a pink sofa between the windows and the only other occupants of the room were an elderly couple immersed in a catalogue.

The Jew's conversation was reassuring. In his presence Zara felt that nothing crucial could happen.

He stood for permanence. She couldn't imagine him concerned in a spectacular upheaval. He trimmed his sails to the winds which had blown for countless centuries. Unlike the Authoress, he did not attempt to twist his small portion of life to the shape which best suited him. He submitted to the use life made of him and found it co-ordinate with his own purpose.

Tea came in heavy china and Zara gulped the apparently tasteless liquid. It was very difficult to swallow.

"Well?" asked the Jew.

Zara drew a deep breath. Every nerve in her was contracted, so that her feelings were entirely physical.

"Christopher has been gambling," she said and explained the situation in a few words. She was surprised to find that her eyes were glazed and that there were gaps between the sentences. Her ideas fell into these and got lost.

"That's all right," said the Jew, as if it were the most ordinary thing in the world, and a tear trickled through Zara's eyelashes and stuck, in what she felt must be a ridiculous manner, half-way down her cheek. She didn't want to cry. It wasn't done, especially in the Carlton Club, but the nervous pain inside her constricted her breathing. It was like acute indigestion. She tried to drink some more tea and the tear fell into the cup.

The Jew was speaking quietly. "I'm so glad you came to me. It's nothing. Just send me the broker's account to-night and I'll settle the whole thing. You need not worry any more."

Relief began to permeate Zara's consciousness. She

knew she must accept. She meant to accept, but her pride was hard hit. She protested. "It's a huge sum. How can I take it from you? So many women must have done the same thing, and they all promise gracefully to pay you back and of course they don't. But I can never pay you."

"You won't have to. Every year I give away much bigger amounts in answer to all sorts of appeals. This is all in the day's work. The great thing is that you shouldn't be worried."

He lit a cigarette and increased the distance between them on the sofa. Zara felt as if he had said to her, "I shan't ask anything in return; I shall never remind you of this. You needn't be troubled."

Her throat was so stiff, she couldn't thank him properly. She just sat there, conscious of relaxing strain. Soon her body would become pliable and responsive flesh instead of a jangle of taut wires.

The Jew went on talking in a pleasantly matter-of-fact voice. He seemed older and more set than when she had first known him. His resilience had been tempered into a delicate detachment.

"Have you finished?" he asked at last. "I'm afraid you've had very little tea. Will you forgive me if I rush off. I have to see someone very charming at six and," he smiled, "she'll be furious if I keep her waiting."

Zara wondered if he had emphasized the implication for her further reassurance. So there was a woman. Perhaps he was going to be married.

Standing beside the tea-table, she attempted to thank him—"You don't know what you're doing. It's

tremendous. I think you are the best man I've ever met. One can thank for ordinary kindness, but there are no words for this. You've given me—" she wanted to say "peace of mind" but her voice broke. After all, he must know the value of the reprieve his generosity had granted.

"I shall never forget it," she said and meant it. Nor did she change. The memory of that half-hour in the ludicrously inapposite room remained with her as one of the few vivid impressions of a life so continuously disturbed that the brain had no leisure in which to record more than, here and there, an outstanding event.

Zara telephoned to Christopher before she reached the flat and her relief was transmuted into a heady gladness by the quality in his voice when he repeated, "You've settled it, but how? Did your father come up to scratch? Zara, he really is a topper. How did you manage it? I can't believe I'm awake. Say it isn't a dream. We must celebrate to-night. Whew! we certainly deserve it. I'll get tickets for that new thing at the Playhouse."

Zara was inordinately irritated, but it did not show in her voice. "Nothing of the sort," she said, "we'll do some serious tailoring to-night."

"Cutting our coat—" laughed a responsive Christopher, "can't we leave it for twenty-four hours?" but Zara had hung up the receiver.

During the remainder of her homeward walk, she considered the advisability of enlightening Christopher as to the identity of his benefactor. Eventually she decided against it. Since his revelation in the train,

he had taken for granted that she would appeal to her father. She herself had spoken of it as a last resource, implying that it was a fairly certain one because there were hours when she feared for Christopher's sanity.

The matter was decided when the man leaped up the stairs, two at a time, flung open the door, forgot to shut it and thrust into his wife's reluctant hands a box of Eucharist lilies. "Aren't they gorgeous?" he said, "and I'm so thankful it was your father. I couldn't have borne it from anyone else."

Believing it the highest possible privilege to have children, Christopher-Carlyon accepted as a matter of principle that a father should be willing to make any sacrifices necessary for their welfare. His own parent didn't count. He was abnormal.

Having no idea of the value of money, he did not question the feasibility of the action he attributed to John Wincombe and, on Zara's advice, he continued to keep out of his father-in-law's way. "Oughtn't I to write and thank him," he asked in the first flush of his gratitude.

"No, the money was a present to me, not to you," returned Zara and because Christopher-Carlyon would have given away anything he possessed without considering the cost, he accepted what he imagined to be Mr. Wincombe's help in the spirit in which, had the positions been reversed, he himself would have bestowed it.

The broker's account was paid within twenty-four hours, but no amount of persuasion seasoned with common sense could induce Zara to accept anything

more. The Jew repeated his offer of an allowance. Cerberus spoke clumsily of his house, where several empty rooms were eating their heads off!

"Why don't you come and camp with me for a bit?" he suggested. "You'll find Westminster good for your writing."

Zara smiled at him, "Westminster has a reputation for making cotton into artificial silk, but I'm doubtful if in my case the formula would be successful."

Since leaving Universal Ltd. she had applied herself industriously to the fabrication of articles and short stories, but the market was glutted with machine made stuff and she was still too hidebound by frustration to be able to express that aspect of herself which, in its appreciation of life, was akin to genius.

"You take too much trouble," said Cerberus, pushing up his spectacles so that he looked like the puzzled result of an incident between an owl and a fox.

Zara shrugged deprecating shoulders. She had pared her ideas till nothing was left but the nakedness of the core. By such use of the scalpel she hoped she was cultivating style. "Tell me," she said, "how do journalists live, because, when newspapers boom against inflated credit, it doesn't seem to occur to them that they live on it. One is lucky to get paid within six months. I wish the baker and the butcher had the same indifference to debit!"

The face of Cerberus was a series of engaging excrescences or depressions, no one having any particular relation to the others. Thus his chin was round as an overfed Franciscan's, his mouth cribbed from a street urchin and he combined the brow of a mathe-

matician with a nose which, at first sight, would have been attributed to an unsuccessful boxer. His hair was a scarlet thicket and his voice rumbled as if it had got mixed up in a landslide.

"I say, you know," he ejaculated, "I can easily advance you a certain amount of screw."

"On behalf of rival journals? How excellent is your acumen."

Cerberus flushed and his spectacles slipped into the groove they had worn on that pugnacious nose.

"Nonsense," he growled and Zara laughed.

"I'd no idea it was so easy to borrow money," she said, "I shall make a habit of it," and, passing him on her way to make tea in the bathroom, she lightly kissed the most extravagantly upright tuft of his outrageous hair. "You're a dear," she said, "and I do hope you appreciate the fact."

Cerberus was profoundly embarrassed. Dining that night with the Genius whose hands were haunted with diverse creative power, so that, to them, all material was malleable under the inspiration of his speculative brain, this Editor who prided himself on being the watch dog of advanced materialism, found himself on the verge of sentiment.

The Genius was surprised. "I like the planes of her face," he said. "They would go well on glass. I tried her as a mask but the thing was unutterably perverse."

"Then it was right," said Cerberus gloomily. "You have a knack of being right."

This sounded altogether too much like Finis to the Genius, who believed in experiment. He protested and managed, eventually, to involve his guest in one

of those interminable discussions concerning the relations of art with manners, by which he intended morals. Mental bankruptcy parted them shortly before the dawn.

The flat in Shepherd's Market found another tenant and after prolonged search, during which she reached the summit of desolation and exhaustion, Zara discovered passable rooms in a small square off the King's Road. They were ugly and uncomfortable, but they were clean and the curtains looked as if they had been recently washed. There was a drastically patterned wall-paper, which clashed with maroon upholstery. There was a bamboo whatnot loaded with china. The carpet gritted furiously under the feet. It was a resentful carpet made of harsh, unfinished whorls and its insufficiency was eked out by a rug whereon the aniline dye was spreading into pools of pink. Zara hated the room because it was smug and overcrowded. She eliminated half the furniture, including the whatnot, and, within the limited means at her disposal, set about improving the general appearance of their habitation, but it was Christopher who arranged his possessions with such art that the glass and porcelain, the prints and the miniature of the boy Napoleon, dominated the room, reducing it to the quality of a stage set.

Zara did not mind the King's Road. On Saturday nights, it was like a play. She had no prejudice about the herd and it amused her to wander between the stalls heaped with merchandise which might have poured out of a still life by Van Gogh. The naphthaline flares wrought strange lines and shadows on the faces of the vendors. In the yellow glare values were changed and

the crowd lost its everyday drabness. The moving figures, intent and purposeful, were no longer prosaic housekeepers burdened by the necessity for making shillings go further than pounds. They were the concomitants of a Holbein festival and the drizzling or frost-stilled night against which they were etched, was the curtain which ended their diurnal labours. After seven o'clock on Saturday, King's Road had an air of distending itself. Released from its normal occupations, it fluttered into all sorts of colour while its activity slackened. Zara, learning the value of pence and the price of everything else, saw expectant motherhood haggling, loud-voiced, over supplies, or trudging clumsily, with harrowed face and the last-child-but-one entangled with skirts which had nearly always come out of the belt. She saw it neat and respectable, but terribly obvious. She saw it frowsty and blatant and it gave her a transient impression of being one with life and the herd. Why had she set such store on being different to the rest of them?

Deadly tired and unaware of it, she would push her way through the crowd, catching its jests and appreciating the good nature which made possible its separate existences. But the instant she returned to the ill-lit house in the square and the door opened to a smell of oil-cloth and stale food, depression took hold of her as if it had physical tentacles. The smell caught her throat and made her sick. Sometimes she actually retched as she went up the stairs.

If there were a fire in the sitting-room, it would be comparatively all right, because Christopher-Carlyon had brought bits of old stuff from Maurden and their

splendour was like raw colour splashed from a brush. The cope hung opposite the fireplace and another wall was almost hidden by a strip of brocade, purloined from the Gate-Tower. But it was a particularly severe winter and coal, bought in small quantities, was exorbitant. Zara never felt thoroughly warm unless she were in bed.

There were two brass bedsteads, standing cheek by jowl and finding comfort in each other's support for their elements were vocal and uncertain. Christopher inhabited the one which seemed most likely to subside and he loathed it as he loathed everything about their present life. Fortunately the Brewery was at that moment in the process of re-organisation and it made stringent demands on Christopher-Carlyon's time. Maurden occupied his week-ends and provided the contrast without which he could not have subscribed to the existence ordained by circumstance and enforced by his wife. Zara would not accompany him to Kent. He must have no reminder of their existence on the edge of penury.

Mr. and Mrs. Wincombe naturally wanted her to return to 107 Buckingham Gate. She could have her old room on the third floor. Nothing had been changed in it. Zara shivered as she remembered the yellowing paint and the eiderdown which leaked. She had hoped for something different when she married and here she was in the same brand of room but translated into a lower order, yet peonies peeling off the walls where a tin bath had leaked above them, were more bearable in King's Road.

If only it were not so cold. Zara, always shivering,

began to take long walks in order to encourage her circulation. In those days she often went to tea with her mother and relaxed in a shabby but relatively comfortable chair, she felt as if there were, after all, some bond between them.

"I don't like to think of you in those miserable rooms," said Mrs. Wincombe one afternoon towards the end of January. It was a Sunday and her daughter had lunched with her because Christopher was at Maurden. It was sleeting outside and the empty street looked as if it were being systematically flayed.

Sipping pale coffee beside the drawing-room fire, which had a humbled appearance due to damp wood, Mrs. Wincombe gave vent to the indignation which had smouldered within her since her daughter's marriage.

"Why can't Mr. Hilary do something for his son? It's abominable of him. With that enormous place, he must have some money."

Zara found it impossible to explain her father-in-law's dread of expenditure. To part with actual cash was more physically alarming to him than a transfusion of blood. His money was in some way sentient like his flesh. He could not separate them.

"It's an interesting experience," said Zara, referring to the King's Road, "and, for once, Mr. Hilary approves of me. The flat was an extravagance and a vanity and heaven knows what else virulently immoral."

She wanted to be amusing but she was feeling ill. A jagged pain shot up under her arm. When it ceased her lethargy was like cotton-wool. She felt she needed

rousing. She would walk home in spite of the ridiculous climate.

Mrs. Wincombe opined that a man should support his wife and Zara was consciously forbearing. "I don't make anything at all now," she said, "except food. I'm getting rather good at that. My landlady is becoming positively respectful. I showed her how to make a soufflé the other day."

She smiled, remembering that it had been a successful dinner and that, after it, Christopher had thawed. It was so difficult to get near him nowadays. He was always gentle and hardly ever accessible. His unhappiness was as obvious and as consistent as the frost which had stopped William's hunting. It went on and on. Zara felt there was no reason why it should ever stop. William, referring to the frost, was of the same mind. The young lady of means had jibbed at immediate matrimony but allowed it to be understood that she was considering the question. William was content. He never hurried anyone, women or horses. Nevertheless, he made a habit of the King's Road, because Zara's appearance made the obvious appeal which is irresistible to the male. He felt sorry for her and uncomfortable about it. She wanted a bit of amusement. He took her to musical comedies which bored her and vetoed her suggestion of "The Apple-Cart." "Too long-winded. A fellow doesn't go to the theatre to have to think. I like to see what the johnny's driving at."

Robert was in Paris.

"Have you been writing anything?" asked Mrs. Wincombe, anxious to show her interest without impinging

on her daughter's privacy. She reflected that young people were hopelessly coarse about most things and incomprehensively reserved about others. There was no sense of duty in the modern world. People did things because they liked them, which was absurd, for so few of the things one liked coincided with what was right. Mrs. Wincombe had cultivated a perennial sense of duty which was as comforting to her as conscience to her husband. Ruminating on the lack of religion in modern life and the way nobody was willing to put up with anything, she hardly listened to Zara, who was explaining, "Just at present, I can't. My ideas are like treacle. I get stuck in them. It's a horrid sight."

She didn't say that she was floundering in the grip of her body. It wouldn't let her get away. From being a servant, it had become a horribly intimate master, sardonically amused and gloating over the relations which made it impossible for her to escape. In those days her body did all sorts of things which disgusted her, but her arms were lined with an ache. She wanted to hold her child in them. Sometimes in the middle of the night when she could not sleep, she wanted it so much that she hugged a pillow or clasped them closely across her breast, imagining the moment when they would be filled. The tenderness which Christopher-Carlyon repulsed, because he was afraid he might give way under it, went into her conscious preparation for the child. It was beginning to grow in her mind. She had no doubt, now, that she wanted it. Sometimes she was surprised at the hungry anticipation with which she awaited the end of an intolerable novitiate.

When they had completed the personalities which, between them, did duty for conversation, Zara rose and looked out of the window, upon which Mrs. Wincombe said, "I'm so sorry Thorpe is out, but there's always a taxi at the corner. Shall I get it for you, darling?"

## CHAPTER XXII

Zara refused the taxi. When she left the house the sleet had, momentarily, ceased, but the pavements were deep in slush and occasional gusts spat hail out of a sullen sky. It was a horrible day and the cold edged its way between the girl's bones, so that she felt as if they were being forced apart by wedges of chilled steel. She must get warm. Ignoring the pain which forked up her side so that she felt as if someone had struck her, she set out at a good pace down Grosvenor Road. There was no break in the leaden clouds. They dropped lower over the slabs of yellowish grime evenly pierced with holes that were, of course, windows.

Zara wished she were in the country, that by some miracle the sun would shine, that Jane were with her —she was too physically miserable to want Christopher-Carlyon—and, by the time she reached Sloane Square, she wished she had taken a taxi.

The sleet began again as she rounded the corner. Driven by a powerful Nor'-Wester, it caught her full in the face. From the exiguous shelter of a doorway, she scanned the empty square. There was little traffic and the few pedestrians, leaning forward, with heads bent, were molecules in the unshackled force of the storm. A bus charged through the gathering dark and Zara saw it as a liner, ploughing the Atlantic, its lighted windows exaggeratedly lonely because of the

waste they punctuated. She stepped forward, was jostled by someone hurriedly descending and, losing her footing on the slippery pavement, stumbled into the road. At that moment, a second bus skidded up and, in a frantic effort to avoid being run over, Zara flung herself backwards. She fell full length and was, for a second, unable to help herself. Someone picked her up. She was conscious of the drag under her arms. A policeman materialised from nowhere. The bus-conductor was solicitous.

Zara, finding herself the centre of a rapidly developing scene and painfully aware of her condition, made an effort which blenched her lips. Once on her feet, she was able to escape from her sympathetic audience, but with muscles which felt like jelly and pain girdling her back, she hadn't the faintest idea what she was doing. Spurred by fragmentary pity—"Slipped she did and right on 'er pore 'ead!" "Lor' lumme, and she expectin' too!"—Zara hurried down the nearest turning with the instinct of an animal going to ground. It happened to be the King's Road and when leviathan after leviathan thundered past her, streaks of scarlet movement against the quiescence of the Sabbath, she remembered that she ought to have taken a bus.

It was beyond her to make the necessary effort to stop one of these monsters. Perhaps a taxi? She looked blindly into the murk and the long street shifted as if it were a drop scene. Zara blinked at it, stupidly. Amazing things were happening to the lamp-posts and the distance contracted and expanded like a concertina. A dozen different apprehensions hammered at her brain. She was wet through. She would catch cold. The

landlady would be out. Had she brought a latchkey? There was no cab within sight. The drunken road stretched interminably. She would never get home. These crystallised into one definite terror which urged her forward. She must get home. Something was going to happen. Blundering along the pavement in whose wet surface the lights were spilled like gold on a sheet of glass, she had no particular consciousness. Pain nagged her with the reminder of what it might do; but it was still distant. Her feet did not belong to her at all. Her head ached and perspective changed in front of her so that the Town Hall seemed at one moment to be charging into the embrace of a public house on her right.

Half-blinded by the sleet, she did not notice the trees which marked the end of her journey. Movement had become automatic and her mind registered trivialities. Several passers-by glanced at her curiously and, at last, a woman spoke to her. "Excuse me, but are you all right?"

Zara hoped that her voice was steady as she replied, "Yes, thank you. I'm going home," and she mentioned the name of the square.

She didn't want help. She wanted to be alone. She made a movement to continue her way. Her brain insisted that she must not stop. It would be fatal. If once her feet ceased their automatic progress, right, left, right—how difficult to know which was which, feet were stubborn things—

The woman took her arm and turned her round. Zara thought she said something, but, at that moment, her strength began to ebb. It went from her like a

receding tide, so that she hung in the woman's grip and was, by her, propelled along an æon of pavement. At last, when she felt emptied of sensation, a voice pricked her lethargy. "What number is it?"

Zara, feeling that something was required of her, moved abruptly in the right direction. How absurd! She didn't really need help. The wind had dropped and here was her own door. She tried to thank the woman and made several bad shots with her latchkey.

"Is there anyone here? I don't like to leave you," said an ill-educated voice.

The woman was neatly dressed and very respectable.

Zara managed to smile. "You've been an angel," she said. At least she meant to say it from the comforting familiarity of the passage, but the door shut suddenly and she was alone.

Zara went up the stairs as if they were eternal. First one foot, then the other. How tedious the repetition. The sitting-room door was open. The fire had gone out and a smell of sour greens pervaded the cold. Pausing on the threshold to gather strength, her consciousness narrowed and focussed. Something impended. It was imminent. She lurched towards a chair. Ah, now it was coming. Like a beast from the shadows, pain leaped at her. It got her down. It tore her body to shreds and threw it away. Terrified, but with one clear cell in her brain which acted as a dictator, Zara wrenched herself out of the chair and lurched up another half flight into the bathroom. There the beast did its worst with her and, when she saw the result, she was sick.

Leaning against the wall, hanging on to something

which gave suddenly and brought an avalanche of domestic implements about her head, she told herself she must have a doctor. But there was no one in the house. Very slowly she went back to the sitting-room. Moving gingerly as if frightened of breaking the body which remained to her, she took off her clothes. Bouts of shivering made it difficult, but when at last she was between the sheets which felt unnaturally chill, she told herself, "It's over," and her first reaction was surprise that it had not been worse. So quick, she thought, and now it's finished.

She had not time to realise the full implication of the phrase before the real pain began. This time there was no warning. Her limbs were beginning to relax and, in the comparative comfort which resulted from the cessation of all movement, a friendly stupor lapped her brain. Then, when she least expected it, pain took her to itself so that she became part of it and that which she had previously suffered was of no account. Her body was ground on the rack and when it could bear no more, a brief respite was granted, so that the mercy of unconsciousness might be denied.

The landlady looked in at seven to know if she should lay the supper and found her lodger speechless with eyes that were terribly defenceless. "Whatever have you been and done to yourself?" she asked, shocked by their fixity. Had she been imaginative she might have guessed they were looking into another dimension, the nearness of which was responsible for her own discomfort. As it was, she said she'd fetch the doctor, but he was out, so she fetched a cup of tea instead and

stood at the foot of the bed watching the sweat burst over Zara's forehead.

"You cry out, dearie. It don't do no good, holdin' things in," she advised. "A real noise does a powerful lot o' good. My daughter now, she fair brought the house down and it were her third and no damage done."

But Zara would not make a sound. It had become a point of honour with her. She would not be beaten to the point of unavailing protest. If only that woman would go away.

"Can't you get any doctor, anyone at all?" said Zara harshly. The veins in her throat were congested. Her body twisted itself into an arc. She bit the pillow and her own flesh, but her spirit triumphed in the silence it imposed.

The landlady was upset. Previously, she had been pleasantly excited, but now she went out into the King's Road and consulted with several neighbours. They naturally returned with her and when what should have been Timothy-Anne was born, it was to the accompaniment of a murmured, "She do look bad," and the shaking of grizzled heads. They'd been through it themselves these work-worn women, whose bodies bore the mark of pain. They knew all about it and they would have helped in rough fashion, but Zara's silence frightened them.

In the end she was not aware of them. All the strength left to her was concentrated on defence. No sound broke through her lips.

When Christopher-Carlyon returned towards midnight, a self-important landlady, who had been anticipating this moment with the keenest relish, explained in

detail. "She had a terrible bad time, but 'er 'opes is over now, *h*opes I should say."

She followed a running Christopher up the stairs—dearie me, she hadn't expected him to take on so, not wot she would have called a lovin' husband, like the chemist's assistant her daughter had married, most attentive he was and never went out of an evenin' while his wife was expectin'.

Christopher came into the bedroom like a spring wind. Silent and swift, he was there before Zara had time to prepare an expression. So for a fraction of time, blinding and revealing, he saw her disarmed.

It was a shadow which lay on the pillow, the face hewn into grooves and charged with sweat. The eyelids appeared to be sealed by the stains which surrounded them.

"Zara!" whispered Christopher-Carlyon and Zara smiled. She could not do more for him.

"Darling, do get a doctor—" and then, "Darling, darling, I'm so terribly sorry—"

Christopher-Carlyon was on his knees kissing her hand. "You, you," he muttered. "What does it matter so long as you—oh God!" For she had opened her eyes.

What he saw in them sent him into the street, bareheaded. He routed a specialist from his bed and brought him back in a taxi, which he urged to unnatural speed. The specialist did things which normally Zara would have thought unbearable. "I don't like it," he said, with sympathetic distaste. "This sort of thing makes all the hairs on my spine stand up, but we've got to be sure—"

When he had finished with her, he told her she was absurdly brave. "You should let yourself go. It's better for you."

He gave her an opiate and went out to Christopher-Carlyon whose calmness he misinterpreted. Considering him unfeeling, he told him deliberately and in detail what his wife had suffered.

Christopher spent the night in a chair in the sitting-room. Every few minutes he crossed to the door and listened, but Zara, exhausted, slept. It was not till dawn accentuated the exceeding chill, for it had not occurred to him to light a fire, that he began to grasp the fact that he would not now have a son. "Never," he told himself, for he was still under the spell of Zara's pain. He wouldn't let her go through it again, but the determination left him desolate. Life, at that moment, was a personal enemy. It had cheated him.

Christopher crept to the door and opened it. The figure under the bedclothes looked very slight and still. The window was wide open and the air was raw. Christopher-Carlyon looked round for something to supplement the meagre blankets. There was nothing but the cope. He took it down from the wall and spread it carefully over the bed. Zara stirred as if in protest.

# PART TWO

# THE WANTON

## CHAPTER XXIII

Easter was late, but it made up for its delay by aping midsummer. Sussex was a patchwork quilt in which blue and gold predominated. Zara, walking through the woods, felt the blood stir in her veins. It was so long since she had been well like this. Her mind walked backward, stepping delicately for she did not want to get bogged in memories. During the two years of her marriage much had been suppressed. She had submitted to the necessity because she loved Christopher-Carlyon. Well, she still loved him and she felt responsible for him, but it was so wonderful to be well again. "I might have died," said Zara aloud and, to prove that she was not dead, she ran along the path with hazel catching at her skirt and moss squelching under her feet. She was glad to be alive.

Zara could not remember the morning after the Pain. A frightened Christopher had telephoned to Buckingham Gate and Mrs. Wincombe had taken charge. She was at her best in illness and Zara had not minded her fussing. It was agreeable to be looked after. The material comfort which resulted from her mother's intervention was reassuring. For several days she was content in the cessation of all worry. At the back of her mind, there was something bitter which had to be faced, but she wouldn't let it come out. She refused

to think. As soon as it was possible she was moved to Buckingham Gate and people were amazingly kind. Hers was the sort of trouble they could understand. Even the Well-Known Woman brought flowers and she told Zara she must see more of her when she was better. Cerberus came to see her, and amused her with his conversation. Soon Zara was able to measure her loss and she felt that it was hardest on Christopher. Her arms might be empty—it was amazing how Timothy-Anne had fitted into them—but for him Maurden itself was void. He had made so many plans for his son and all of them connected with the castle.

For the first weeks of his wife's illness he wouldn't go there. In every room he would have seen a Timothy-Anne out of reach. Then Zara, on the eve of her departure for Widelands, where the Interesting Woman restored to her health, common sense and humour, said to him in a matter of fact voice, "It was bad luck, wasn't it? But next time it'll be quite different."

"Next time?" repeated Christopher-Carlyon blankly.

"Yes," said Zara. "I'm going to hurry up and get well and then we'll start all over again. You haven't lost Timothy-Anne for ever."

At the moment Christopher-Carlyon was shocked. How could she think him such a brute. But, by the time he joined her at Widelands, the idea had borne fruit. After all, other women had been through the same thing. Zara informed him crudely of this fact and laughed at his dismay.

"Next time," she said, "we'll have a cottage in the country and it'll all be perfectly simple."

Striding over the yielding clay, the girl put aside

such memories. The present was splendidly all right. Deliberately pagan she thought there had never been a spring like this one. The undergrowth was flushed with green. The branches above her were a net burdened with the weight of the sky. The smell of the earth was in her nostrils and it was fecund with growth. Zara remembered her promise to Christopher and knew that she could not yet fulfill it. She was free, freer than she had been for years and the strength of her body delighted her. She was no longer afraid of it.

Long-limbed and hatless, with hair blown back from her forehead, she came across the park and burst upon the group in the loggia. Jane, responsive in spite of the worldly goods in which she was encased, felt that something untamed had come out of the woods and the Authoress regretted that so much splendour should be wasted on Christopher-Carlyon, but an immensely tall figure got up—in stages—from a camp chair and said, "It's ten years since I saw you, and you haven't changed a bit." Zara found her hand gripped by the Cambridge Blue and she wondered why the light were not suitably attenuated. Then she smiled at him with malice.

"But you have changed immensely. You're almost portentous. What are you now?"

"Merely a solicitor—very dull, but I try to forget it occasionally."

Zara studied him with interest. His face looked as if it were hewn with a hatchet. The forehead was unexpectedly low and the hair grew strong above it, but he was good-looking if only for the decisive an-

gularity of his features and an air of coltish strength. Zara had forgotten his exaggerated length.

"You've grown," she said. "Haven't you overdone it a bit?" But she was surprisingly pleased to see him.

They extricated themselves with a direct simplicity more baffling than any amount of diplomacy, from the plans in which the others would have involved them and went off after tea to fill in a ten years' gap.

Walking, or sitting on anything that happened to offer, they talked about themselves and what they thought of life. The Blue's voice was dry and Zara told him he had swallowed too much dust.

"You're just the same," he repeated, "and you oughtn't to be. It's all wrong. I expected you—"

"Well, what did you expect?"

"Something completely unconventional."

"Instead of which I'm most respectably married."

The man wanted to ask, "Why?" but he refrained, though Hilary was the last sort of man he had imagined would appeal to her. To begin with, he looked ill. That waxen pallor couldn't be healthy, but he didn't want to think about her husband. She was too damned desirable. How inadequate he must have been.

Zara shared his smile and he asked her, "D'you remember? You upset me for several years."

"Until you found dust a suitable substitute."

The man was illogically chagrined. "Do I give you the impression of being nothing but a solicitor?"

"A charming one," mocked Zara and he would have kissed her there and then, but that the proximity

of the tennis players revolted his sense of what was apposite.

By the following afternoon the spate of their personal reminiscences had subsided and each knew more or less what had happened to the other.

The Blue played for his county and was inclined to marry when he found a young woman of suitable height, who understood music and was willing to be friends.

Zara, walking beside him over a ploughed field, remembered Jane's remark about the one impossible relationship between husband and wife. She repeated it and the man swept it aside as a cobweb due to the careless habits of a previous generation.

"How old is your sister's husband—forty, forty-five? I thought so. It's different with us."

"Why?"

The man considered and it was in his solicitor's voice that he answered. "I suppose because, fundamentally, we do regard women as our equals."

"In every way?" asked Zara.

"Yes, I think so," and from this answer they proceeded, naturally, to a discussion of sex.

It was hot on the exposed slope and when they reached a coppice they sat down in the shelter of some bushes. A field of mustard flared below them and, beyond it, the downs rolled seaward. The view was inspiring because of its scope. There was no definite horizon and Zara, appreciating the fact, felt as if life were at her feet.

She was interested in the man beside her. His physical fitness added the italics to their relationship.

It became personal and communicative because of the mutual pleasure they had found in the climb. Zara threw herself on to her back and stretched luxuriously. Her head was on a cushion of dock leaves and the grace of her body was visible under her sweater. She was remembering that to-morrow she would be on her way abroad—really abroad, not the usual kind which means exchanging one view for another while retaining the habitual frame. The specialist had insisted on it and John had made it possible—dear John, he really had been astoundingly good. Shocked at what had occurred because it obviously could have been prevented, he had offered his sister-in-law whatever portion of the world his money could procure. Zara had chosen haphazard on a map because this smallest of all British protectorates looked lonely and unget-at-able. There would be no tourists and she could justifiably buy a flea-bag.

Christopher would stay at Maurden and his parents would be amenable because they were slightly ashamed and anxious to make amends.

The part played by the Jew had been revealed after a harassed Mr. Wincombe had refuted any claim to the generosity with which his son-in-law insisted on crediting him, but fortunately it had happened on a day when Zara's condition was critical. Wavering out of the dimension which seemed to her then infinitely desirable, the invalid had been obliged to allay Christopher's unexpressed anxiety. "I've never seen him since. Don't worry. It was quite all right," she had whispered when she realised that the said anxiety had no connection with her health. The dissolution she

had only just escaped lent sufficient finality to her voice to convince her husband.

Subsequently she had tried to explain the motives which induced her secrecy, but Christopher was incapable of appreciating them because they detracted from his conception of himself. "I shall repay it," he said, and since the idea contented him Zara encouraged it. It was taken for granted that, eventually, Maurden or the Brewery should be mortgaged.

"Why did you pick out Hilary as a husband?" asked the Cricket Blue as the logical sequence to their exceedingly frank conversation and Zara returned with a start from the other side of the ocean. She didn't want to talk about Christopher. He would be happy at Maurden, so she needn't worry about him. It did just occur to her that it was unusual for her to be contented with the mere fact of not having to worry about him, but she was preoccupied.

"I wanted to escape from the sensual element which I imagined was disastrously strong in me," she expounded slowly and then, developing the theme, she found herself impersonally interested, so that the man beside her received an accurate impression of her experiences.

"Then you've never done it just for pleasure?" he asked.

"No," said Zara, surprised and faintly shocked.

"You would expect the man to be in love with you?"

"I should have to be in love myself."

Both remembered the episode under the tunnel of trees and Zara answered the man's thought. "Yes,

I know it was extraordinary and you're quite right. There is no difference really between kissing at that degree and the act of cohabitation. It's an artificial delimitation created by technical virgins for the satisfaction of their own passions."

The man protested, but Zara was certain of her premises. "It is the desire which counts one way or the other and not the method of its satisfaction, which is obviously dependent on opportunity."

"I didn't know you were such an ascetic."

"I have been," said Zara and she turned over so that she lay full length, propped on her elbows, her chin cupped in both hands.

"Passion is disgusting unless it is prepared for complete fulfilment," she announced and the man laughed.

"You really are very charming. May I kiss you?"

Involuntarily she turned to him and he crushed her to him swiftly, kissed her lips till they opened and then buried his mouth in her neck. His embrace was hard and strong, but he let her go before she had time to savour her own reaction. The next moment he was on his feet pulling her up.

On their way home he repeated that she was very charming. When they reached the woods, she hoped he would kiss her again, but he refrained. He had an infallible sense of décor.

The discussion which followed was without the least reticence, but Zara was surprised when the Cricket Blue remarked that they might meet in France on her way back from the smallest British Protectorate. As she felt neither self-conscious nor awkward, she

decided that the elements which had hitherto constituted her character must be in process of changing.

"It would be fun," she said stirred by his proximity, but she had no intention of acceding to his casual suggestion.

"I think I might make you happy," he ventured and Zara retorted with spirit:

"I'm quite sure you wouldn't make me happy, but you might amuse me."

"It comes to the same thing, doesn't it?" said the man.

Motoring back to London in one of John's cars, Zara was conscious of the riot in her veins. She didn't want to talk. Imagination stimulated her senses and she gave way to them.

## CHAPTER XXIV

A FORTNIGHT later a very small steamer overwhelmed by a sense of its own importance fussed into a harbour almost as shallow as a milk-pan. The smallest British Protectorate was not accustomed to bestir itself. In spite of the shrieks with which the steamer threatened to burst its syren, it was some time before a launch came out to it. A solid khaki figure sat in the stern. Zara leaning over the rail thought it belong to one of the hottest British officers she had ever seen. Then she realised that he had come to meet her. John's doing, she supposed. John had interests everywhere and, tangled up with them, a surprising number of friends.

The officer saluted and Zara noticed that he was damp as well as hot. They were rowed ashore by picturesque people in many yards of trousering and nothing else but polished brown skin. They breakfasted on the verandah of the hotel, a nervous little pink building huddled in a garden. The British officer ordered eggs and bacon in spite of the temperature and Zara felt pale until a sympathetic waiter produced figs.

The drive to the capital was long and dusty. Wedged into a springless car between the corners of her luggage, the girl had time to reflect on the quality of this particular version of the great "abroad" and on the

exceeding squareness of the khaki-clad figure she had left standing in white sunshine against a blinding white wall. Its eyes were red-rimmed from the glare and its face also was red, under a powdering of dust. It was meticulously shaved and its little yellow moustache was so shorn and tailored that it looked like cocoanut matting above rather a nice mouth—at least it would be nice if it smiled.

Zara did not stay long in the capital. It was not inviting and as the authorities had ordained extensive reconstruction, it looked as if it were suffering from a recent earthquake. The streets were disembowelled and their internal organs, in the shape of drains or cables, lay about naked and unashamed. The hotel was infested by a particularly voracious breed of mosquito.

On the third day, Zara contrived to attach herself to a party which was going into the mountains and, for the first time in her life, she was completely happy. There were no posts north of the capital so there was no reminder of any other form of existence. Zara's world narrowed to the essentials of food and sleep. Her brain ceased to function except so far as was necessary in order to keep in the saddle of a particularly vicious little country-bred which made a habit of backing whenever the track hung over the edge of eternity.

All day they rode under a sun sufficiently fierce to accentuate the desirability of evening and the cessation of all effort. They slept wherever the mountain side offered sufficient level ground and they washed when they met a stream, or when the Scientist, for

whose benefit the expedition had been organised, decided that cleanliness was more important than progress. It took a long time to wash in two inches of water spread in pools over the surface of an india rubber bath which had the tendencies of damp macaroni.

After six weeks in the mountains Zara, physically, was unrecognisable and she had no mentality worth mentioning. Her body had fined and strengthened till it was like wire sparsely covered with smooth flesh and all that flesh was golden where she had steeped it in the sun. Her face, burned to the colour of bark, was relaxed and still because, for the moment, there was nothing behind it except content with the day's labour and the night's peace. After the first week she forgot to think and later she wondered why mankind were cursed with speech.

She had never known such ease of movement. Every muscle answered its purpose without effort. She watched the Scientist drop from his pony and lumber stiffly up the rocks and wondered what was wrong with him. Her limbs were tireless while she made any demand on them and afterwards lethargy wrapped them like an eiderdown, so that she lay utterly relaxed wherever she happened to throw herself. The Scientist was interested. He had never seen anyone so instinctively animal. "I should say she hadn't got a brain at all," he remarked to a colleague who wore spectacles and stooped, in order to be habitually nearer to the specimens which interested him. Zara, overhearing, laughed. She didn't want a brain at present.

When they came back to comparative civilisation

the heat of the valley was like a blow between the shoulder-blades, but the girl did not mind it. Her body was in harmony with the sun. She walked hour after hour in thin breeches, damp at the knees. Her shirt was open and her throat baked to match her boots. She would not wear a hat in spite of the Scientist's warning and her hair, dusty and a couple of inches too long, rioted back from her forehead.

The earth-stained mountain men who resembled the stage conception of brigands and shot each other for sport, but were infinitely hospitable to strangers, regarded her with admiration. One of them taught her to use a rifle.

The Scientist thought she was a little mad, but he fell in love with her "fundamentally" as he was careful to explain. The sentiment did not disturb him, but it was sufficient to sum up Zara's sense of well-being. The earth was hers. She kicked portions of it down the slope in front of her because she liked the sound of rock slipping on rock. She liked all the sounds of the mountains and every feeling of them except the 4 A.M. one when the sun forced the barriers of sleep and opened her lids to the necessities of another day. There would certainly be a scorpion in her riding-boot and the Scientist was immune from breakfast. Someone might be making coffee, but there would be no milk and nothing to eat with it.

The coast decided to welcome the return of the expedition. It gave a picnic on the battlements of a fortress whose elliptic formation irritated the Scientist because none of his fellows would agree with him concerning its origin.

There were three women at the picnic which began about seven o'clock in the evening and more than a dozen men, among them the British Officer who had met Zara on board. This time he wore a brown suit and a slouch hat. He did not look so broad and he had an amusing twinkle which leaped out suddenly and was very disarming.

The moon was conveniently late and Zara, anticipating the alchemy which would turn the lagoon on one side and the gulf on the other into molten steel, climbed to a rampart where the masonry was cushioned with thyme. She lay on a bank of it, her feet tucked under her skirt because large blue beetles went blundering about, and the British Officer sat behind her. At some point in their desultory conversation, Zara heard him saying, "I should awfully like to kiss you, but I suppose I should get into trouble."

She did not answer because the moon was behaving like the God of Genesis. It was creating a new world. Breathless, the girl watched a miracle whose like she had never seen. "It's stupendous," she said slowly and there was nothing in her which did not ache. Conscious of an immeasurable need, she stared at spread silver arras, with the design of mountain and forest engraved on a metal sky.

"Would you be surprised?" asked the voice behind her and Zara had not the faintest idea what it was talking about.

When she discovered, her reply was terse. "Yes, I should, because I wasn't thinking about you."

They remained on the rampart till the moon had swung up to mid-heaven, taking her magic with her.

The man said one or two things which were unexpectedly charming and Zara, aching for the whole beauty of life, took the fraction of it that was offered. The man kissed her with energy but, apparently, without passion. Then he helped her down the broken edge of the wall. The descent was tedious and Zara bored because she wanted to be alone.

After they had rejoined the rest of the party, who were sitting close together in the open, for they all knew each other too well to be influenced by a mere moon, she managed to slip away by herself. The rest of the night was satisfactory for she wandered from one point to another, conscious of the great walls as man's challenge to time. The challenge had endured through so many centuries that its origin was lost, but the moon, of course, must know about it.

Zara, stimulated beyond the possibility of self-control, knew she wanted to rush swiftly through the night for the delight of speed and the effortless distention of her muscles, but she wanted also to lie very still and close to the earth, with the smell of it in her nostrils and the feel of it in her outflung hands. But she didn't know whether it were joy or sorrow which prompted her sudden paganism.

At the bottom of the rocks on which the fortress crouched like an animal too old and too wise for anything but defence, there was a fitful glow. The British Officer sat on a rock smoking a pipe. He said something about Zara needing a man to look after her. She spoke of her husband. It seemed the easiest method of regularising the situation. They walked back to the village talking about the country and

parted at the door of the house where Zara lodged.

But the next day he motored her back to the capital and it happened that the hotel was full. The British Officer telephoned to a friend who replied as heartily as the instrument would permit, that his house was at their disposal.

"He's got someone else staying there. I didn't catch who, but there are several rooms. Let's get along there now and see what we can fix up."

The motor jerked them protestingly through the operating theatre which had once been a street and at the end of a lane there was a house tucked in behind blind walls and carefully wrapped in fig-trees. It appeared that the "someone else" was very much occupied.

After they had settled their rooms and implored the servant, who wore riding breeches and puttees, to be generous with a famous brand of insecticide, they had tea in the hall. It was a pleasant place with windows at both ends and the canvas chairs were particularly comfortable.

The British Officer took off his coat. The sight of him with his sleeves rolled up and a teapot in hands covered with golden down was too much for Zara. She laughed in her wholehearted and therefore individual fashion. "It's too absurdly intimate. I feel as if we'd eloped."

"So do I. It's an agreeable feeling, don't you think?" and, still holding the teapot, he came across the room and kissed her hair.

Thereafter the affair became a joke. Each played up to the other and, whenever he happened to be near

her, the man kissed whatever bit of sunburned skin most tempted his lips. In this mood they went out to dinner and were very gay over what they suspected was goats' flesh though the Greek, who waxed rich on his catering, assured them it was "lamb most exceedingly young."

The restaurant was crowded with the dregs of several nationalities and they could not even get a table to themselves, but they drank each other's health in the local wine and felt as friendly as a couple of puppies who have been hunting the same rabbit.

In the upheaval of the ill-lit street, fenced by a darkness full of poignant scents, the man took the girl's arm. It was bare and the thrill of her flesh went to his senses, or it may have been the sweetness of tobacco plant, or the complicit darkness which stole after them into the lane. The yard was very quiet and it was obvious there was no one in the house. The door shut behind them with an air of finality.

In the hall, the British officer produced cigarettes. "Not time for bed yet?" he said. "You're not tired, are you? Let's have a drink." His voice was studiously even. Zara did not drink, but she watched him while he mixed a whisky and soda.

What followed was inevitable. They sat on a sofa which had mislaid most of its springs and the man smoked one cigarette after another. Zara wished he would finish his drink because she wanted him to kiss her. There was only one lamp in the hall and it was heavily shaded. From the open windows the darkness pressed in on them. Frogs chorused by the river

and the air was heavy with spent heat and the smell of dung fires.

At last the man put down his glass and took Zara into his arms. This time he kissed as she had imagined Christopher would do on their wedding night. She felt as if a blade were being driven into her heart. Desire became an ecstasy and she could not tell whether what she felt were pain or pleasure. She struggled, not against the arms which held her, but against her own need of them. No moral scruples restrained her, but Christopher-Carlyon was in her mind.

It was not that she said to herself coherently, "I can't betray him," but that he had never been out of her thoughts for several years. He had become part of herself and she was accustomed to considering his reaction to anything she did. While her strength ebbed, so that her body felt broken and her brain focussed in an intensity of expectation, she fought because Christopher was there with her. He had never known this rending need, but, if she succumbed to it, she would be taking from him something which he valued.

The arms about her tightened. Her head slipped against the back of the sofa. She felt the man's hands on her flesh and she knew then that it was beyond her strength to resist, but she would not be taken piecemeal. Something in her revolted when she felt a dog licking her hand as it trailed on the ground. With an effort she dragged herself away and stood upright, but she had to steady herself by the back of a chair.

"Let's go to bed," she said harshly.

The man followed her up the wooden stairs and,

being a simple soul, to whom nothing quite like this had ever happened before, he was not certain what she meant. On the landing he asked if he might come to her room and she answered impatiently, "Of course."

While she undressed in moonlight, she felt cold and resentful. Everything was horrible. Her body, deprived of its usual fastidiousness, was an enemy demanding too much of her. It was inert. She could hardly get it out of its crumpled garments. Her brain dismissed the thought of Christopher. It was too late. In feeling if not in actual fact she had already betrayed him. Downstairs on the worn sofa, she had given all of herself that mattered. The act of cohabitation was no more than a belated justification for the sensations she had shared. Stripping herself mentally as well as physically, she knew that at this moment, she did not want to give herself "for pleasure." She remembered the question posed on the hillside with a field of mustard flaring towards the sea, and her answer. Well, she was certainly not in love, but she was going through with it. It was the only way to restore her self-respect. Half measures were ridiculous as well as disgusting.

The man was sufficiently honest to make no pretence of love, but he had spent his war-leaves in Paris. He had learned what La Rochefoucauld called "the art of flesh," and in his arms, Zara discovered the meaning of pleasure. Before the moon had wandered away from their windows, she was happy. In a deep contentment, born of the same sort of satisfaction which at the end of the day's trek had flung her full-

length on a hillside, rejoicing in the pliability of her muscles and the utter quiescence of her nerves, she lay on the bed, chin tilted back, eyes half closed. It was all so simple and she was glad of it. Her hand sought the man's arm and touched it gently. She wanted to assure him of her friendliness, but she hoped he wouldn't talk. It must be so nice to be an animal. Speech would not be expected of one.

The British Officer, on the other hand, was beginning to marshal his surprise. The girl was obviously inexperienced. She might almost have been a virgin. He rumpled his short, stiff hair and looked at the figure beside him. In its unconscious beauty, it was not quite real. No woman could be so indifferent to the effect she made. He found himself blurting out the question whose persistence confused him and Zara answered in the matter of fact voice of a schoolgirl, "No, of course, I haven't had a lover before. You ought to know it."

"But, why in heaven's name," asked the man, metaphorically tearing his hair, "should you choose to give this to me?"

"I don't know," said Zara, looking up at him.

She would not talk. She wanted to savour the satiety which had obliterated her fears and such scruples as she had been willing to admit. The man left her when he saw that she was half-asleep.

## CHAPTER XXV

In the morning the servant, who still wore breeches and puttees, had to knock at her door for five minutes before he could wake her. On the other side of the landing the British Officer listened with some anxiety. Could anything have happened? He wanted to go and see, but the stranger was shaving with his door open, so he was obliged to refrain.

The three of them met at breakfast. The girl felt agreeably limp. The fibre of her being had softened, and she wanted to be near the man who had wrought the change. She felt exceedingly friendly towards him and she would have liked to communicate to him her general sense of well-being, but the stranger insisted on talking politics.

The British Officer waited assiduously on Zara and smiled at her whenever he had a chance. Perhaps she needed reassurance. He felt absurdly responsible. Supposing she regretted it? As soon as they were alone, he asked her, "D'you hate me this morning?"

Zara's brain registered the Victorianism of such a question, but she could not for the moment dissect it. Too much of her was intimately connected with this quite ordinary man, neither young nor middle-aged, who, in khaki shirt and slacks, looked very clean and rather golden because of the Esau quality of his skin.

"Of course not," she said. "I like you immensely," and for the first time she realised that he was certainly likeable. He had several strongly defined senses, of humour, of honour, of fitness. Zara saw his mind divided against itself, so that he cultivated a bleak exterior to hide an excess of sentiment.

"You're really rather delightful," she told him.

They motored to the port from which in a few days Zara was to sail. The car stopped half-way between the villages which liked to consider themselves towns and, while the driver spent a heated hour in communion with the more greasy portions of its intestines, his passengers sat under a tree and progressed towards friendship. They hadn't much to talk about except each other, so Zara described Maurden and the amenities of the King's Road, but she said nothing about Christopher-Carlyon. He belonged to a different plane which had no connection with the present. When the British Officer regretted her departure, she refused to consider it.

"We've three days left," she said. "Let's enjoy them. It's never any good looking ahead."

So the man talked to her about his not very brilliant career and the sporting dogs he was training and his liking for the natives who were fine fellows if you took them the right way. But he did not mention his wife whom he loved.

The car recovered sufficiently to proceed and, in the hottest hour of the day, they lunched on macaroni and figs in the little pink hotel where they had breakfasted the previous month. They laughed as they remembered how little importance they had attached to each other.

"I thought you were dreadfully solid and British to the backbone," said Zara.

"And I didn't think about you at all," said the man. "I was rather busy that morning."

They stole the afternoon from the amiable official in whose house Zara was to stay and spent it talking and smoking on the loggia opening out of the man's bedroom. No one else stirred in the hotel. When the heat waned, they went inside and the British Officer made tea. "The local brand is chestnut mash," he said.

Zara was tidying her hair in front of the inadequate mirror and he deserted the kettle to kiss the back of her neck. Subsequently they forgot the tea.

"I must go," said the girl at last. She did not want to move. Her languor was a precious vestment which she was afraid of tearing.

"You're just like a boy," said the man, drawing a finger down the slender limbs outlined in the folds of his dressing-gown. "I didn't know any woman could be so slight. It's wonderful."

But when she had dressed, he dismayed her by saying, "I don't know what it is about you. Your face is not in the least pretty—except sometimes in a hat—but I can't let you go."

Zara thought, "Am I really not in the least pretty?" Startled, she looked at herself in the glass. For him, she wanted to be beautiful.

That night in the middle of a dissertation by the amiable official on the subject of Imperial Preference, a note was brought to Zara. Surprised, for she had never seen the British Officer's writing, she tore it open and read: "In this country, which is a bit mine,

I couldn't let you go to bed without saying good-night. Sleep with my arms around you and think of my love."

Hitherto, they had not spoken of love and Zara, scribbling a reply as requested, was sure she was immune. Friendliness and desire were blended in her feelings for the man with whom she spent most of the time which remained to her, for the amiable official was overworked and only too thankful that his guest could amuse herself.

On the last night they hired a comparatively reliable car and jolted out a dozen miles to a hill which commanded the full sweep of the bay. Across the water, the walled town sprawled up the side of a cliff which was dominated by a line of watch towers. Carrying rugs and a picnic basket, they clambered up the boulders till they found a ledge surrounded by strongly scented bushes. From here they watched sunset and moonrise, cooking sausages on a spirit lamp and drinking hot coffee out of a grandfatherly thermos.

Zara, hatless as usual, sat clasping her knees, her chin sunk between them as she stared at the ocean. "It's horribly impersonal," she said shivering, and the man put an arm round her. It was he who had arranged how they would spend their last evening. To him the whole affair was a mystery. He had met this untutored creature, half savage, half child, on the top of a moonlit castle, suspended between sea and sky. What followed was stuff o' dreams. Owing to Zara's reticence concerning her married life, he could see no reason for it. It would give him something to think about during the lonely evenings. But he wanted

to preserve its quality, so he planned that they should part as they had met, high up above the world, with wind and stars and smell of the earth as their companions.

"You know, this is going to hurt," he said, friendliness in the pressure of his arm.

"Does it matter? Isn't it worth it?" retorted Zara.

"I'm a bit in love with you," said the man, "and I don't understand it."

"Why not?"

Zara wriggled out of his arm and the man picked a blade of sweet grass and chewed it. He was thoughtful.

"You see I love my wife," he said at last.

"Of course you do and you mustn't get things mixed. I'm nothing at all, just an incident which you'll forget in a week. I don't mind."

"Will you forget me at once?"

Zara considered the matter. "You, as a man, yes, but you've been a great deal more than that to me."

"Would you marry me if we were free?"

"No," said Zara. "We haven't anything in common except this." She indicated the curve of the sands below them, which were like a scimitar laid flat against the sea. "It is too incredibly beautiful," she muttered. "How can one help giving way—"

This was at the beginning of the evening when they still floundered in half-finished discussion and explanation. Later they forgot everything but the need they had of each other.

Stumbling down the hillside in the pallor which precedes the dawn, Zara was astounded at what they had

done. "I must have been mad," she thought. A cold wind whipped her body and most of it was bruised.

Because they were not sufficiently stoic to adhere to the man's original suggestion, they decided to part decorously in the garden of the little café, where the official population met to drink aperitifs and rehash the local gossip. But, inevitably, the British Officer came to the wharf to catch another glimpse of the woman who had made havoc of all his preconceived notions concerning sex. At the last moment, he eliminated the amiable official and inserted himself into the already overladen launch. He came on deck with her and they wandered restlessly from port to starboard; then they descended to the frowsty saloon and drank Vermouth. Finally, they went to her cabin where they sat hand in hand and talked very little.

Zara, with a pain in her throat and the feeling that there was nothing more left in her, knew that words were useless. There was nothing to be said. Eventually, when the syren was spluttering its last warning and a steward was hurrying down the passage, knocking at every door, they clung together trying to express what was already beyond them.

"Here's a letter I wrote you this morning after I got back to the hotel. I want you to read it to-night because I can't be with you."

Sitting on the edge of her bunk, while the ship rolled gently, Zara read four sheets of incoherent passion. The lines ran together and there were gaps where the writer's imagination raced ahead of his pen. Sadism impregnated the unbridled imagery. Zara was revolted when she saw the actions to which she had

not at the moment objected, translated clumsily into words. She tore the letter into small pieces and threw them out of the porthole, but she answered it the following day, and it was only then she realised that she knew no more than the man's surname.

During calm, sunlit days steeped in satisfaction, so that her brain refused to make any avoidable effort, she speculated idly as to what she would feel when she met Christopher. Words blunted the result of action, she thought, or else they made it crude. She could never separate herself from her husband, because he represented the enduring responsibility of her life. Even now, with the memory of another man's arms so poignant that, if she shut her eyes, she imagined herself back on the hillside, her hair tangled with leaves and the wind whispering over her bare limbs, she knew that if this other man and Christopher-Carlyon were in danger and she could save one or the other, the British Officer would not even exist for her. She would only be able to see her husband. How odd it all was and not at all as depicted in novels. "Remember the act of the flesh has so little importance." Someone had said it, but, for a moment, she couldn't remember who it was. Of course, the Faun talking about policemen. Well, she had been consistent and the episode was closed. Zara, stretching luxuriantly in a deck-chair, which she had placed as far away as possible from the other passengers, revelled in the fulfilment of her body.

She would be so much nicer now to Christopher-Carlyon. She would not distress him by demands

which he could not understand. Out of her exceeding richness she could afford to be generous.

It was in this mood of comprehensive toleration that Zara arrived in England. She had a moment of acute apprehension when the train slid into Victoria station. Supposing she had jeopardised her power of appreciating Christopher-Carlyon, but the instant she saw him on the platform the old tenderness wrung such particular organ as is affected by frustrated longing not exempt from pity. What a lot of experiences they had shared. Before the onslaught of intimate memories whatever was alien in her present consciousness succumbed. And Christopher-Carlyon looked ill. When he smiled at her over the heads and shoulders of the crowd, his excitement did something to mitigate the dull pallor of his skin, but Zara, clinging to him, with no thought but for his changed appearance, asked at once, "What is the matter? Have you been overworking? You look like a ghost. What has Maurden been doing to you?"

Christopher tucked her hand into his arm and made for the entrance. "It's the usual London expression and quite natural," he said. "You musn't compare it with your indecent health. I've never seen you look so well. It's reckless and Olympian—yes, that's it. You look as if you'd only just come back to earth."

"Complete with smuts," said Zara and she reminded him about her luggage.

"Oh Lord," said Christopher, "we shall have to fight our way into that mess." And Zara, who had never seen him so tired, was disappointed. She wanted

everyone to be immensely well and to be riotously conscious of it as she was herself.

They spent the night at John's house in Park Lane. It was shuttered and the sheeted furniture was obviously shocked that anyone should wish to use it out of season. They dined in a boudoir whose intimacy was entirely impersonal. It would have offered the same studied comfort to anyone who happened to want it. John's houses were peculiarly empty when his wife was away. It had rained steadily for a week, so the housemaid had lit a fire and, in front of it, Zara and Christopher-Carlyon began to talk as differentiated from making conversation. Within the first hour the girl felt she had never left England. The smallest British Protectorate was becoming altogether incongruous. In an effort to re-establish its position, she described it for the benefit of Christopher and she spoke quite naturally of the British Officer. It had been an amazing experience. She would have liked to discuss it with her husband.

Christopher was very sweet to her, but there were smudges under his eyes and his face had certainly shrunk. When his thoughts wandered the slackness of the cheek muscles was apparent. His flesh seemed oddly vacant. Zara was frightened. She remembered her illusion of Maurden as a vampire draining the vitality of the hierophants who succeeded each other in office within its unchanging walls.

"I'm sure you've been overdoing things," she insisted and Christopher answered:

"Well, don't you go and leave me again. How can

you expect me to wax fat and complacent when you take away half my life?"

There were twin beds in John's superlative mansion, but Christopher-Carlyon, after he'd tucked his wife under a Rose du Barri eiderdown, mixed her ovaltine for her and opened the window, talking happily all the time, asked in a quaint, shy voice, "D'you mind if I leave you? I've got rather used to being alone and you'll probably want to sleep late."

Zara wriggled up to kiss him. "Darling, of course," she said. "Let's make the most of all this rich space."

Christopher returned her embrace with gentle ardour. It was like the devotion of a novice before the altar. Zara, feeling grown-up and pitiful, said all the right things and Christopher went to bed happy, but he could not sleep. Towards three A. M., he supposed he really had better see a doctor, but that afternoon they went to Maurden for the week-end and he forgot about it.

The castle was not so actively inimical as Zara had pre-supposed. For a couple of days Christopher would not let her leave him because he had so much to show her, a new duck which swanked about the moat as if it were an admiral in a rowing-boat, the panelling he had scraped, a secret opening between two fireplaces whose discovery had provided the thrill of his existence, a wall which he was rebuilding out of the old bricks. "I had the mason up from the village and he showed me how to mix mortar—it's fascinating," he said.

There were splashes of the home-made product on his trousers. His shirt was mended at both elbows, but Christopher was unaware of these deficiencies.

Watching his content Zara was grateful to the Castle because it reincarnated the man she had first loved, though her heart ached over the deterioration she had seen in London. She spoke to her father-in-law about it and to his solitary visitor, an Anglo-Catholic, who lived physically in Paddington, but, mentally, in the reign of Pope Alexander VI. He was a strange individual who might have been a great lover or a great ascetic. That he happened to be neither was the fault of conflicting impulses which urged him at one moment to shave his head and sing the miserere outside the door of the wife whose conventions he systematically outraged, and at another, to fling himself on the ground to kiss the shoes of a surprised young woman who was conscious of the darns in her stockings. When he was clean, he was brilliantly attractive, with one of the very rare mouths which look as if they had been hand-wrought with purpose and patience rather than cast slipshod in any mould that happened to be available. He wore horn-rimmed glasses when he felt it was worth while being observant and his eyebrows were black and humorously tormented. One of them climbed upwards when Zara spoke to him about her husband. "Christopher never had much use for the flesh," he said.

Mr. Hilary was even less responsive. "Don't you put ideas into the boy's head. It's been deuced hot this summer and you gave him a pretty severe shock yourself."

Her father-in-law obviously thought such reference was sufficient indication of his own feelings, for he neither congratulated Zara on her recovery nor con-

doled with her on the illness which had sent her abroad. She did not interfere with him. Therefore he was prepared to tolerate her presence, providing it did not increase the household expenses. As an after-thought he added, "It'll save a lot of money if Christopher lives down here. He can get a season ticket for the price of a fortnight's fares. It's wonderful how they do it."

It had not occurred to him to include Zara in the invitation, but for the rest of the summer she divided her time between Maurden and John's house in Sussex.

Jane was delighted at her sister's appearance. "I was afraid you were going to join the submerged tenth," she said, "but you look suspiciously pleased with yourself. Is it Christopher or somebody else?"

Zara evaded the question. "I've become a leech," she said. "It's really a very agreeable existence living on other people. I can't think why more don't take it up as a profession."

But when they moved to London for the autumn, Zara only agreed to live in Park Lane on condition that she found something to do. John was amused. Independence in any woman but his wife was mildly intriguing. He would have thought Zara'd had enough of it. However, he took some trouble to secure her a secretaryship with a politician who owed much to John's financial support and whose gratitude was but "a lively sense of further favours to come."

Christopher protested that he did not like Zara to belong to anyone but himself. "You're different when you're with Jane," he said. He had never forgiven

his sister-in-law for her intervention, or rather the subsequent proof that it was justified. But the house in Park Lane was very large. Zara and Christopher had what was practically a flat to themselves and when the latter felt his independence outraged, he used his season ticket and went down to Maurden for the night. Sometimes, in spite of the promptings of his spirit, he was too tired to face the journey. Then he contented himself with buying flowers for both sisters or some new *objet de vertu* which made him feel superior to his surroundings. He made several appointments with a doctor, but postponed them at the last moment because he was, subconsciously, afraid. Meanwhile, Zara had gradually become accustomed to his appearance. It was not that she loved him any less, but that he showed her so little of himself. All day he was at the Brewery. Often, when he came in tired, he would slip into his bedroom to lie down before dinner. In the evenings they were rarely alone and, at night, after a talk in Zara's bedroom which the girl felt was never long enough to satisfy all her curiosities, Christopher would entrench himself behind a phrase or a smile. When the door closed behind him, it was irrevocable. There was no more talk of Timothy-Anne.

Zara might have made more strenuous efforts to break into this physical privacy had not the Cambridge Blue begun to assume a definite position in her thoughts. He was almost the first person she met when she came to Park Lane. Subsequently, he was a regular visitor and on those nights when Christopher took refuge at Maurden, he made a habit of inviting Zara to dine with him. For a popular young man he

seemed to have an unusual amount of time on his hands, or perhaps he had no social conscience. In any case, whenever Zara was in need of a companion he offered himself with an even good humour which roused her interest.

"You are, I suspect, a superior person," she told him one evening as they drove to a small and pseudo-Bohemian night club, where they proposed to eat sausages and drink beer after a play, "but you are a very agreeable one."

By this time they had become great friends for they were interested in the same books, people and problems, so they were never at a loss for opinions to express or attack. Neither of them had many convictions. In the man's case, thought was still fluid, and in the girl's, for in spite of all her experience, Zara was not yet a woman, conclusions had proved to be like skittles. She did not like contemplating their downfall. The night-club was crowded, but the waiter gave them a corner table because he liked the look of Zara. The walls were made of small squares of glass and the lights were reflected through whorls of smoke onto a golden ceiling. The band was sure of itself and of its effect. It played with discrimination so that the dancers found themselves treading on their own thoughts.

The Cambridge Blue ordered many sausages and Zara, lighting a cigarette, asked him, "D'you remember our walk in the summer and how we sat above the mustard field discussing love?" The man nodded. "You asked me if I ever did it for pleasure. Well, I did, when I was abroad."

The Cambridge Blue was interested. "Was it satisfactory?" he asked.

"Very, but we were neither of us in love. At the last moment, the man thought he was, of course, because your sex is so much more sentimental than mine."

Her companion protested, "Not always. I grant you a certain type of male generally to be found empire-building or doing something equally unproductive in wildernesses where all the odds are against him, is apt to wax sentimental. It's the only outlet permitted by his inhibitions."

Zara laughed. "What exactly is an inhibition? I always use the word when I want to impress the Family with my exceeding erudition."

"A four-wheel brake on one's instinctive inclinations," suggested the Cambridge Blue.

"And a complex?"

"A skid when the brake is carelessly applied. Now tell me what happened to you."

Zara described the events which had preceded her departure from the smallest British Protectorate. "And it meant nothing at all—at least nothing lasting," she concluded.

"Why should it?"

"Is love then really no more important than any other appetite. Are we to treat it like food when we're hungry or a hot bath when we're cold?"

"Love is exactly what you make of it, no more and no less."

"I thought it would be terrible and tremendous," reflected Zara.

"Had you brought to it terror and immensity, it would probably have come up to your expectations, but you were taken unawares so the perspective changed without your noticing."

"It sounds as if it had been anti-climax," said Zara and she thought of the years wherein she had oiled the cogs and tightened the nuts of the four-wheeled brake. "But it wasn't," she added.

"I think it's a mistake to put too much into love. It becomes too complicated, like this sausage, in which there are more herbs than meat." The Cambridge Blue dissected a peculiar coloured oblong and waved it on the end of his fork. "It's scented," he said and then, "The best ingredients for love are a general companionableness and good bedroom manners. I should hate a really temperamental wife. When two people are friends and they like each other's bodies, they call it love."

His manner and his voice were dry, but his smile belied them.

Zara frowned. "There are more than two elements in love," she said, but she could not explain the third. It was what bound her to Christopher-Carlyon and it was immutable. She could imagine having several lovers and many friends, but this feeling was outside and beyond such relationships. It must last till the dissolution of one body or the other because it was part of them. Perhaps it was an ultimate loyalty beyond the reach of circumstance.

Conversation flagged in the rapidly thickening smoke. The atmosphere became oppressive and Zara's eyes

watered. "I can't think any more," she said. "Let's go home."

"Is it too late for you to come to my flat?" suggested the man as he paid the bill.

"Yes. I start work at nine every morning," returned his companion.

In the lift which descended some half dozen storeys with immense circumspection, the Cambridge Blue, leaning back against the wall and regarding Zara in a borrowed mink coat, announced with a mixture of satisfaction and surprise, "You certainly are delightful and I do adore you."

Zara was pleased. "How nice of you to sound so insincere. It makes the remark quite charming."

## CHAPTER XXVI

THEIR friendship developed with the winter. It was stimulated by a succession of debates in front of heaped log fires and, some time in November, Zara decided that it was the nicest thing which had happened to her for a long time. If, at moments, the Cambridge Blue happened to be particularly attracted he kissed her without ceremony. They both enjoyed it and it did not interfere with their arguments. For the first time Zara found her relationships satisfactorily balanced.

For Christopher-Carlyon she reserved the tenderness which had been largely instrumental in uniting them. He was always the one person who mattered and it is doubtful if he was ever out of her mind.

Through the earlier weeks of what threatened to be a particularly severe winter, she was always persuading him to do the sensible things he disliked, such as wearing an overcoat and taking elementary precautions against the recurrence of his influenza. It was curious how any household with which he was connected began to consider "the 'flu" as Christopher's private possession.

Inevitably, a maternal element entered into Zara's feeling for her husband. He was so defenceless. Since her visit to the smallest British Protectorate, she had some conception of the way part of man's normal

life had, in the case of Christopher-Carlyon, been amputated at the root. That the operation was self-inflicted made it no less disastrous. Talking to him on those occasions when a fine day had raised his spirits, or he had drunk sufficient champagne to blur the outlines of the spectre which was now definitely haunting him, she found him curiously biassed. There was no end to his illusions and his code was rigid where anyone but his friends were concerned, but he was gradually losing contact with the average human point of view.

"Something will happen to you," said Zara feeling that she was conversing over a long distance telephone though Christopher was sitting on the same sofa with nothing but a cushion or two between them. "You'll wander out of this world altogether and you won't be able to get back again."

To her immediate distress, Christopher began talking about death. He called it the finest of all adventures. "Imagine the excitement of it," he said. "The explorations of Columbus and Stanley were nothing compared with the thrill of walking out of this life into another of which one can't even guess the dimensions."

Zara shivered. Her courage was limited to the boundaries imposed by body and brain.

"I think it would be the most exciting thing in the world to know that to-morrow one would be rid of all one's limitations." Christopher's eyes blazed. "It's great fun being me," he said, "because I can see just a bit further than most people."

"In certain directions," interpolated Zara.

"There are only a few which matter. D'you remember that evening we couldn't get a taxi after Greta Garbo's film and we had to walk most of the way back? You were so worried because I hadn't got a coat, but it was the most wonderful night. The sky was so immensely far away that it was like walking in a canyon. The lighted windows were the first rungs of a ladder, but you couldn't see the others."

Zara did not remind him that, subsequent to this adventure, he had been voiceless for three days. When she was with Christopher she was conscious of struggle. He caused in her a permanent impression of pain because she always wanted to give more than he was willing to take. There were moments when an apparent barrier fell, but there were always others behind it.

"We used to see the same things," she said studiously controlling her voice.

Christopher nodded. "But you want to see everything at once," he replied.

"There is so little time," said Zara, remembering that quite soon she would be thirty. Surely, by then, she ought to have evolved a satisfactory curriculum. It would be terribly disappointing to be just, suddenly, thirty, with nothing to show for it.

"Yes, that is rather frightening," said Christopher, "but it goes on. There's no gap."

"What goes on?"

Christopher could not answer. He felt that the miracle of which he was always conscious could not be confined to the duration of a human span, but how and where it endured was beyond his conception. He

did not need to enquire, for death would provide the explanation.

So they talked at random and loved each other in spite of it, for Zara's instinctive purpose was Christopher-Carlyon. Her outlook was focussed to that end.

She told the Cambridge Blue, after one of his quick, effective embraces, "You're just a trimming, but an eminently suitable one."

The man laughed. "And you're the most sincere person I've ever met." He considered his next remark. "I shall always like you even more than I love you." To his analytical mind, the emotions were separate and distinctive. Zara thought of marriage. She liked all of Christopher that she knew, except when he was particularly impractical. "Is it possible to be in love with two people at the same time?"

"Of course—half a dozen—but in different ways."

They were at the night-club which they found stimulating to psychological conception. The Cambridge Blue said the band had studied midwifery. To the accompaniment of their insidious fingers on keys and bow, patrons were painlessly delivered of their ideas.

"It would be much nicer to be in love with one person in every way."

"Ideal," retorted the man over the edge of a tankard, "but it rarely happens."

Zara remembered a somewhat similar conversation with Christopher-Carlyon during which he had expressed the conviction that he would never wish to kiss any woman but his wife.

"Have you never just wanted someone, anyone, apart

from loving them?" she had asked him, and the man, reflecting, had answered, "No, I am sure I haven't. Why should I?"

The night-club was full of clatter. The few waiters balanced sky-scrapers of crockery, which loomed through the whorls of smoke with an effect of imminent but always at-the-eleventh-hour-averted disaster. Two very young men were drunk and the secretary hovered round them with the air of a hen doubtful as to its authority over adopted ducklings.

"What d'you expect to get out of marriage?" asked Zara.

"Chiefly companionship and I should rather like some children. I don't imagine that either of us would necessarily be debarred from other sexual interests, but if you think it out, marriage is a royal flush. It's got all the other combinations beat."

"Why?" Zara leaned her elbows on the table and sucked orangeade through a straw.

"Because in our generation it's a fifty-fifty show. You can forget a week-end in Paris as soon as you've suitably acknowledged your pleasure, but you can't get away from the years during which you've worried over the same things, been excited by the same mountains and despondent over the same molehills. Nobody in full possession of their senses can promise to be physically faithful till death intervenes or senility sends him into Hyde Park, but no rational being can be otherwise than constant, when it comes to a mental process gradually developed through years of experience shared."

"Here endeth the first lesson," murmured Zara. "So you do believe in marriage?"

"Solely for the benefit of the next generation. The private relations of men and women are no concern of the state. Its business is to protect the family on which it depends and extra-marital divagations have nothing to do with this issue."

"Illegitimacy?" quired Zara.

"Contraceptives," retorted the Cambridge Blue.

The discussion touched on birth control, but Zara brought it back to religion.

"Christianity was evolved at a moment when the old world had lost its virility," said the man. "It represents the period of asceticism, originated by the Essenes, between the lusts of paganism and the romance of the Renaissance."

So they settled the world between foxtrots and when it was fine they walked the whole way to Park Lane because their ideas ran ahead of time.

It was a most satisfactory relationship in which the mental attraction was stronger than the physical, though, at some period of it, subsequently unimportant, Zara became the man's mistress.

"I have a rooted objection to making love in taxis," he told her one night when they were driving home from a dance, and later, when in spite of this precept he had crushed her against him until she protested, "You're stronger than my inhibitions, but I don't approve of it."

They made no plans, but after their next dinner together, the Cambridge Blue gave the driver the address of his flat.

He was an amusing lover, because he was quite capable of interrupting the course of his emotions to expound a metaphysical idea which had suddenly occurred to him. Between them there was no wallowing in sensations, but, when they didn't want to talk, they made love to each other with a certain vigorous simplicity and felt pleased with themselves as a result.

Zara could not consider the affair an incident like the unreal ecstasy with which was vaguely connected the smallest British Protectorate and an officer in khaki who gave himself away when he smiled, but it was subordinated to her life with Christopher. For a week or two she might not see the Cambridge Blue though, during such periods of abstinence, she generally received several hurried scrawls inciting her to read something abstruse. If, at the last moment, her husband happened to need her company, Zara would always cancel any appointment with her lover. Neither acknowledged any claim on the time or person of the other.

"At least I can promise not to be a nuisance to you," the man would repeat when passion gave way to content and pervaded by a general kindness, they sat on opposite sides of the fire and discussed what they felt.

The Cambridge Blue wished, occasionally, that the girl were free to marry him, but Zara did not think of him as lover or husband. He was, to her, a continual source of interest because he stimulated not her imagination, already inflated by Christopher-Carlyon to what she often felt was breaking-point, but the growth of her brain in which she was surprised to find potentially sound material. The minutes she

spent in his arms, stirred by the pressure of unrelenting muscles, were unimportant compared with the blaze they lit in each other's minds.

In those days Zara thought of the Jew as someone caught in the wheel of a press. The pattern of life was repeated with each turn and he was but a figure in it. The Cambridge Blue gave her a sensation of freedom, whereas the Jew held her bound to a purpose whose beginning and end she could not conceive. He had not married, though she saw him occasionally with the daughter of an impoverished House and she thought that the girl had the hungry expression due to insistent maternal pressure. But beyond including her in his list of guests when he gave expensive parties at the Ritz, he made no effort to continue their relationship which had been so much less and so much more than friendship.

It happened one day that Zara had arranged to dine with the Cambridge Blue and go to a party in a mews behind Upper George Street, but Christopher was detained at the Brewery until it was too late to catch his train to Maurden. He returned unexpectedly to Park Lane and Zara , coming downstairs in the sort of frock she considered suitable for a party which might end anywhere at any hour of the following day, saw him standing listlessly beside a table on which he had just laid a very wet hat. He was sleek with rain and a puddle formed round his feet. Zara thought he leaned against the table for support. Imagination and pity caught her in the throat. The sensations caused in her by Christopher-Carlyon had always some such physical

reaction. It was as if her body were an instrument answering to his feelings.

"You lunatic!" she exclaimed, forgetting the habit of tact laboriously inculcated by communion with Christopher-Carlyon. "You must change at once. You simply can't get 'flu again."

"I've only had the November bout so far," retorted Christopher, but his voice dragged. Zara hooked her arm into his. She'd never seen him quite so dispirited and it was a physical exhaustion in which he allowed himself to be swept upstairs.

"You'd better go to bed," said Zara when they reached the Rose du Barri dressing-room which had no point of contact with its tenant. It was comfortable, but in it, Christopher-Carlyon was a stranger. He had the curious faculty of imposing his personality on the things he used, but the rooms in John's house resisted him as an indesirable alien.

"I'm awfully tired," said Christopher.

As if it were the usual thing to do, he forthwith went to bed and he told Zara that he didn't want any dinner. "I could sleep for ever," he said, and there was such intense weariness in his voice that Zara was frightened.

"I've begged you to see a doctor," she said. "It isn't courage—it's sheer selfishness to go on like this." It was the first time she had ever spoken to him in such a tone and the next moment she was on her knees by the bed. "Christopher darling, don't you understand how you terrify me? I can't bear it. This is a quite different you and it's got to be enquired into." She forced a bantering note into her voice.

"I'm all right," said Christopher, but he had entrenched himself behind what his wife felt might be his last resources. Pitiful and desperate, she knelt beside him, trying to pierce the barrier which Christopher's fear had erected. Until that night Zara had not realized he was afraid, for she had attributed his aversion to doctors to his fastidious regard for the privacy of his body. To-morrow she would force him into the perilous and uncharted ways wherein roam specialists seeking whom they may dismember. It was in some such words she expressed her intention.

"Once in their hands, Christopher, you'll be thankful to come out intact. Harley Street always makes one feel so important. One leaves it with the feeling of a medical encyclopædia proud of the number of symptoms under each heading."

Christopher smiled, but he wanted to be alone. "Weren't you dining with that long fellow?" he asked.

"Oh Lord, I forgot all about it," said Zara with a glance at the clock. "It's too late now. I'd better telephone—" But at that moment a servant knocked at the door. There was a message from the Cambridge Blue asking what had happened to Mrs. Hilary.

"Of course you must go," said Christopher and his eyes looked as if they wanted to see what was on the other side of a page which he did not dare to turn in his wife's presence. "The fellow'll have killed a whole fatted herd. Imagine him alone among the carcasses."

Christopher roused himself sufficiently to send the girl out of the room.

"The rôle of the perfect husband," he insisted, "is to

dispatch his wife to feed at other men's expense. You can tell me all about it to-morrow."

Zara, hurt and smiling, turned in the doorway to give a lurid description of what the party would probably be like. "We shall end on the embankment," she said, but Christopher wanted so terribly to be alone. Zara, seeing it, shut the door on an unfinished sentence.

She was an hour late for the picnic dinner on which the Cambridge Blue had expended a great deal of time and trouble, but the man was sympathetic. He understood Zara better than anyone else of her own generation and he found her more dependable than the other women he'd known. "There are a lot of masculine qualities in you," he told her that evening when she had spoken of Christopher's health without mentioning its effect on his character. "You are extraordinarily trustable. What I do like about you is the quality of your reserve and you are so nice about other people."

"Take care. You are falling in love," said Zara, eating mushrooms and poached eggs, for the partridges were roasted to a frazzle, which in the vocabulary of an indignant cook represented something even less edible than a cinder.

"Not at all," said the Cambridge Blue. "I like talking to you and going about with you and touching you, but then apparently you like talking to me and you make no positive objection to being kissed. Therefore, I take it we're in the same boat, but you would furiously deny the implication that you were in love with me."

"Well, I'm not," said Zara.

The room was colour-washed and hung with modern paintings. There was a black dado on which were indicated, with a sense of proportion but none of perspective, a series of naked women some of them with ear-rings. Opposite the window were shelves bearing a collection of Tang figures, interspersed with Celadon and Phœnician glass. On the floor there was an old Chinese carpet and a round table was piled with books, for the Cambridge Blue cultivated the habit of reading while he ate.

"I've got it," said Zara with an air of triumph. "There's no responsibility in our very comfortable relationship."

The man raised dark eyebrows, over which his hair was inclined to spatter.

"Don't you see, love is made up of responsibility," expounded Zara. "I know it, because I love Christopher."

The Cambridge Blue remarked that this was an obsession due to the possessive jealousy of mankind and the aggravated maternal instinct induced in women by centuries of subjection. Modern love was free simply because it acknowledged no responsibility.

Zara argued, "There is no such thing as love among what we call moderns. It simply doesn't exist. There are lots of other most engaging feelings, some of which ought to be re-named, but not love."

Later, when she lay in his arms on the sofa, so close that their lips touched and their bodies shared the well-being which is the consummation of desire, he asked her, "Is this love?"

"No," said Zara. "It's the nearest we can get to negation."

They went on to the party in the mews of Upper George Street. It was the cleverest little house inhabited by a girl with magic for hair.

"How divine of you to come," she welcomed the newcomers. "There are seven glasses and twenty people—what shall I do?"

Zara suggested a raid on Park Lane, while she wondered how so many people had managed to squeeze into the house. It was a very good party, and Zara, sitting on a velvet-covered coffer, which seemed to have more than its fair share of hinges, all of them embossed, thought that the best possible decoration for a room was to line the walls and cover the floor with such a crowd of young people. They were much more effective than modern paintings and they did not need interpretation. Listening to the singing, she wondered what would happen if a really mysterious person came to London. Would he or she have a success? Would anyone trouble to enquire?

The Explorer came in with the expression of one who would like to keep a secret, but is not sure that it is worth while. And all these people noticed that Zara had a new young man, unknown to most of them and therefore fit subject for speculation. The Scientist, who was small and hirsute, said, "It's extraordinary how that woman prefers physical charm to brains." To which the Genius replied that brains would make a good still life, but Zara was the sole existing proof of perpetual motion.

When at last the singing voice was muffled by the

thickening smoke, there was a general upheaval. Several layers of young people, whose eyes were watering in spite of their enjoyment, decided it was time to drink.

"There are only fourteen glasses," whispered the not-in-the-least-disturbed hostess, and someone went out in a taxi, so that more glasses materialised and rows of bottles with silver necks. The dining-room must have been the smallest in London, but everyone squeezed in it and talked personalities with zest while they ate caviare spread richly on biscuits.

The Interesting Woman emanated from the crowd in order to tell Zara, "I like your young man. Where did you find him?"

"On the Cam in a previous incarnation," retorted the girl, noticing that she was already credited with exclusive rights in the Cambridge Blue. Several people inquired perfunctorily for Christopher-Carlyon, but most of them thought privately that it was quite time Zara "shook a loose leg."

When the party was at its height, Jane looked in, made a grimace at the clatter and was immediately followed out into the mews by half a dozen men. They sat on the steps of the waiting cars and used the bonnet of one as a table. The idea naturally spread and soon the mews housed a picnic, with Cerberus in horn-rimmed spectacles sitting on a radiator playing the ukelele.

At a still later hour, it was discovered that the hostess had seventeen keys to her front door for the previous tenant had been of a hospitable nature. In vain, her successor had attempted to lose the surplus keys.

They were always returned to her by expectant British workmen, who waited for tips. On the spur of the moment it was decided that the keys must be suitably buried.

"With bell, book and candle," insisted Zara.

But there was no available earth.

"We must drown them in the Thames," suggested someone and the motion was carried unanimously. There was hurried search for a cushion on which the keys could be borne in pomp. A candle was wrenched from a sconce and after some consideration the Explorer acknowledged the possession of a camel bell and someone else of a prayer-book.

Forthwith these were collected and a dozen of the brightest spirits packed themselves into cars and proceeded to Westminster Bridge. Here in view of the police who were suspicious and of several out-of-works, who were blasphemous because it was quite time such bloated capitalists learned "oo was top dawg naow," the keys were drowned. The Elfin One read the burial service, while Cerberus tried to play the last post on the camel bell. The candle was self-conscious in the moonlight and it dripped so much of its shame down the trousers of the self-elected acolyte, that he threw it into the Thames.

"Libation to the gods," he cried and the most devoted bobby decided to inform the river police.

"We ought to have had incense," said the Elfin One and a girl tried to light little heaps of face-powder scattered along the parapet. She was not successful but the idea of burnt offering appealed to everyone's imagination. Cerberus stood on the parapet to the

excitement of the police and the delight of the out-of-works who anticipated a tragedy. Waving his arms he made an eloquent speech, in which he referred to a record number of learned Greeks and Latins. Few understood it, but when he tore something glittering from his pocket and threw it into the water, it was followed by a rain of objects, coins, pocket-combs, a ring or two from those who were most exalted and a crucifix.

The police decided that it was time to interfere. The young fools would be a chuckin' of themselves in afore you could say "knife." In fatherly fashion they advanced.

"Now then you gents and ladies is obstructin' of the traffic," said an officer of the law indicating the emptiness of Westminster Bridge at 4 A. M. "You've done your piece and it's time you went off home."

The party dispersed, some of it regretting the inspiration. One youth made pertinent enquiries concerning the grapnels of the river police. If a certain object were recovered—"That's all right, Sir," said a sergeant steering him towards the cars. "We'll let you know if it turns up."

Zara and the Cambridge Blue walked along the embankment in search of a taxi. As it happened, they came first to a coffee-stall and, feeling hungry, they disposed of several sausage rolls, while they discussed the party.

"Rather fun," said Zara.

"But not quite in our line?" suggested the man.

His companion preserved a discreet silence, for it had been entirely in her line, if she had one at all. She

had been single-hearted throughout the evening and her enjoyment had been in proportion. Zara appreciated novelty, especially if it were spiced with spontaneous absurdity. Consequently at that moment she felt alien to the Cambridge Blue, who was remembering that he must be at the office by ten. So she insisted on treating a number of derelicts to whatever food or drink they preferred. They were politely voracious and the affair ended by Zara borrowing all her companion's money and leaving a bracelet in pledge.

When a taxi conveniently materialised it must have been harnessed to the dawn, for light drifted after it and the Cambridge Blue, pushing his reluctant companion towards the cab, pointed out that she would certainly get the sack when she appeared "boiled and bedroom-eyed," with her employer's morning post.

"I shan't go to bed at all," said Zara, but in the taxi she slept with her head on the man's shoulder.

# PART THREE

# THE ICONOCLAST

## CHAPTER XXVII

For a long time Zara looked back on this light-hearted orgy as if it were the end of a chapter. Hitherto, however deeply she had felt certain aspects of her life, she had been able to escape from them. So easily could she be swept into the course of any new excitement that she sometimes wondered how much of her was anchored in the harbour she had deliberately chosen. It was always there, of course, this haven where she had imagined she would be safe from the beast her fear had created, but with the realisation that there was no need for such apprehension, the anchorage lost its value. Still she could, if necessary, go back to it, for excess was not natural to Zara.

Meanwhile she was enjoying all the sensations of the Iconoclast, without realising that there might come a moment when there would be no more idols left to break. In the company of the Cambridge Blue, she found what she imagined was a new freedom, and having destroyed the fetishes of preceding generations as well as her favourite god, which had so long worn the mask of the beast, she set it on an empty altar. Enchanted with her own rebellion, she had not yet appreciated the void occasioned by the defeat of idealism. In place of her old certainties, she tended towards disillusion, but up to that riotous night on the em-

bankment she had always been able to escape the results of her actions.

There was, however, no escape from the news imparted to her the following morning in a Harley Street consulting-room. Christopher-Carlyon had waited too long. An immediate operation might save his life, but it was by no means certain.

Zara went out of the unattractive house, feeling as if her life had been cut in two. Behind her there was a mass of tangled emotions. Impulses barren of purpose ran through the days that had been suddenly amputated. They were full of people and things which did not matter. Beside her, as she came down the two or three steps which led into another world, was Christopher-Carlyon and he was pitifully brave.

Zara smiled for his benefit. She made light of things as they walked down the street of desolation. It was terribly short like the way from the tumbril to the guillotine. Zara, talking brightly and clinging to Christopher's arm which was no longer unresponsive, wondered how many similar sentences were being delivered at this moment behind the walls maintained and repaired by pain. The very pointing of the bricks, the decorations of the more imposing doorways, were paid for by the suffering which set apart this street. A taxi driver took charge of them. His stand was at the corner and he had seen others in the same condition.

By mutual consent they got out at the Berkeley, for they could not go back to Park Lane and sit one on either side of John's mahogany with John's footmen as gaolers of their misery. They wanted to be alone

with it and in the crowded restaurant, where they could sit very close at a small table, their hands touching under the cloth, their bodies touching whenever either could make an excuse to lean towards the other, they were alone. Indifferent waiters brought them food which they did not eat. A band made a noise to numb the edge of their thoughts.

Zara was always grateful to the Berkeley because it gave back to her the Christopher-Carlyon who had been certain of himself. Faced by something he knew was big and therefore venturous, he regained his old sense of values which had been forced out of shape by the pressure of life with Zara. During their marriage all the things which he was sure ought not to matter had mattered too much. Now they had disappeared and there remained only his love, which he had recently feared to examine lest he should find it as misshapen as the rest of his inductions, and of course the necessity for courage. There would be pain, but he was accustomed to that, and there might be death, but in Christopher-Carlyon's opinion any man could be sufficient unto these. He smiled with exceeding kindness when Zara repeated, "It's certain to be all right."

"Of course it is," said Christopher with sudden breadth of vision, but they did not mean the same thing.

The operation was successful. So the doctors told Zara, waiting white and exhausted in a room that was supposed to be restful. She had waited for hours, or for all the æons that pass between dissolution and the throne of judgment. During some of them the Cambridge Blue had sat on the other side of a table

and fought his own battle in gentlemanly fashion. Zara was hardly aware of his presence.

"I'm sorry," he said when she turned from the window with a face wherein all expression had been obliterated so that the eyes looked as if they were being tortured by irresponsive flesh. "I hadn't realised that you cared so much."

He remembered, with amazement, the moments when she had lain in his arms pressed so close against him that their mouths touching had no need to kiss. Yet she had never said she loved him.

"Christopher is myself," she said now, in a voice which expressed nothing at all. "If he dies, the best of me, the only bit of me which matters, will be gone," and then she turned on him fiercely. "Of course I shall forget. That's the horror of it. We do forget all the lovely things that might have made us immortal. We have a definite memory, so that never, never shall we dare to imagine ourselves more than clay. If we could remember the beauty that is sometimes revealed to us, we should be gods and there would be no need for priests or churches."

Zara was on the brink of that disillusion which follows rebellion, for the present-day insurgents are without faith and without creative purpose.

She was surprised when the door shut behind the Cambridge Blue. She wondered who had left the room. Then, pressing her clenched hands against what she imagined was her heart and what was most certainly the centre of physical pain, she moved about the room, wondering what she would do if Christopher died. At recurrent moments she told herself that so

much emotion was unbalanced. Once she dared to say out loud that quite often they had the worst possible effect on each other and then she was terrified lest, after all, there might be a God. If so, he would certainly punish such blasphemy. When she felt she could no longer endure the suspense, the door opened very quietly and a man came in.

"I have only just heard," he said, "I thought I might find you here."

Zara felt that her brain must be giving way, because for a second there had flashed across it the ridiculous idea that no one was ever tried beyond the limit of their strength. Under this impression she asked, "Who sent you to me?" and then she realised the implication of a purpose which she had steadily denied. But the Jew did not answer that particular question. He called her "my poor child" and she did not resent it. Instead, she said to him, as if she were a child about to be deprived of its small world, beyond which, of course, there is no other, "I can't lose Christopher-Carlyon."

"It would be impossible," said the Jew. "How could you lose him?"

When the doctor came in a great deal later they were sitting on the sofa and the man was talking quietly about incidental affairs which seemed to interest his companion.

Zara sprang to her feet and stood poised as a statue of expectation, but she was not alone. Behind her loomed the massive figure of a man who had no illusions either of rebellion or of that transient freedom which ends in autobiography and the conviction that the

world is going to the dogs. The doctor had a curious impression of eternity. He was overtired and for several moments his patient had stopped breathing. Artificial respiration had proved successful, but it had been a near thing. His hand shook as he fumbled for a handkerchief. These long operations were very trying. He must get some rest or he would be in no condition to make a technical speech after the dinner to which he was pledged.

Zara wanted to ask questions. Was it certain that the whole growth had been eradicated?

The doctor spoke of treatment. The patient was young. He had a chance. The operation, as such, had been successful.

The Jew filled in the gaps. "It's finished," he said, "and Christopher will want to see you as soon as he recovers from the chloroform. No, he won't suffer yet. They use so many drugs. You must eat or you'll be no good to anyone."

He took her away and gave her a meal. She did not know whether it were lunch or tea. Then he returned with her to the nursing-home and hearing that Christopher was still unconscious, he made her walk back to Park Lane.

Jane had just arrived from the country, prepared to find her sister distraught. The affair was unnecessarily ghastly. Jane was approaching the state of mind in which she would be indignant with life for its blatant and inappropriate tragedies. Things oughtn't to happen so suddenly. Nevertheless, she was ready to take charge of a Zara half out of her mind. All sorts and conditions of science would be richly emolumated

by John. It must be possible to bribe death in this age where everything could be financially adjusted But Zara needed no such support as her sister could offer. She was even willing to talk about the operation.

Christopher recovered slowly. To him it seemed an unnecessarily laborious process, punctuated by such pain that his spirit flinched from anticipation or retrospection. It sought to escape the utter futility of a contest in which it was not interested.

Zara was fortunately occupied with her Politician from 9 till 1 every morning, but she passed the afternoons in the nursing-home and would not leave till Christopher's exhaustion pleaded for privacy. She spent her entire salary on flowers, searching Covent Garden for strange and beautiful ones. Christopher teased her about her extravagance, but he took everything lightly and it was this attitude which terrified his wife. It was as if he knew that he had been reprieved rather than acquitted.

On the eve of his removal to Park Lane, Zara taxed him with the impersonal quality of his speech and thought.

"According to the doctor I was dead for half an hour," returned Christopher.

"Something of you is still dead and it belongs to me. I want it all back, please."

The man smiled and his wife remembered how fiercely he used to object to the idea that any one person could belong to another. He would not allow any individuality to impinge on his own, but now there was no need to defend his freedom. It was beyond reach of human assault.

Christopher looked around the room, which was barren in spite of its hygienic comfort. "I shall be glad to get out of this place," he said, "it is watching me all the time. Have you noticed that rooms are sometimes terribly antagonistic? This one is. It's annoyed because I didn't die. It had made up its mind that I ought to and now it's comparing me indignantly with all its other cases."

Christopher was tired and his imagination, distorted by drugs, wandered from one extreme to another.

Zara, in red because he liked looking at colour, felt as if she were wrestling with creatures evolved out of opium smoke. She spoke reluctantly of Maurden. "We'll go there as soon as you're strong enough. Your father says we can have the Gate-Tower to ourselves. Won't it be fun? We can pull up an imaginary drawbridge and defy the world at our leisure."

The idea appealed to Christopher-Carlyon. He suggested several improvements that might be made to the Tower rooms. "When I'm a millionaire I shall hang the bedroom with silver lamé—is that what you call it?—and have a crimson velvet bed on a crimson dais, so that when I wake up I can look straight out across the trees. I always think the Tower is like a ship. Unless you go right up to the windows you don't realise it is connected with anything else. I like the loneliness of it."

Zara kissed him, but she could not breach his personal isolation. She tried to think of him as a child playing games by itself, but Christopher-Carlyon had grown up.

The Family was having tea in Park Lane and it

greeted Zara with simultaneous questions concerning the invalid. Robert, on leave, had looked in at the nursing-home several times and made efforts to interest his brother-in-law. There were one or two original plays running in Paris and the politics of Central Europe were more than usually involved, but Christopher was not interested in either topic. So Robert, in whom experience had bred tolerance, described the castles of the Loire, comparing them to Maurden as it must have been in the fifteenth century and the invalid responded in kind.

Robert was thinner. His greying hair was very short and a monocle flattened the lashes of one eye. He had become a student of anything that could be put into writing and his appetite for certain forms of knowledge was insatiable. His colleagues insisted that he slept with a League of Nations Report under one pillow and Saint Beuve under the other, but he did not supply information unless requested so to do, with the result that he was considered unusual by women and his opinions carried weight with his own sex.

Robert's invitation to see if Paris air would prove attractive to Christopher, whom he considered in need of large doses of tonic humanity, was interrupted by William, who had at last become engaged. "I'd set aside this afternoon to go and see the lad, but there was a sale at Tattersall's. My young woman'd got her eye on a mare, a topper, but it fetched four hundred. We couldn't run to it."

Zara, regarding her younger brother with considerable affection, for contact with anyone so easily measured was as satisfactory as roast beef after a

surfeit of French cooking, thought that his young woman was fortunate. She would always know not only what William was likely to do, but the reason for it. They might not be one flesh, for William was of a sleepy disposition and his fiancée extremely active, but they would certainly be one mind, and that not at all an extensive or complicated one. It would be like living in a small, well-ordered house in which everything would have its well-known place. There would be no dust of accumulated ideas, for the William Wincombes would discard all that was not useful and easily understood.

Mrs. Wincombe was sitting in an arm-chair, her small feet sticking straight out with an air of accepting no responsibility for the thickening figure they were required to support. She smiled anxiously at her daughter, whose face had been strained into an unnatural rigidity.

"How is he?" she asked and Zara knew that she wanted to be told all about Christopher's symptoms. Illness was the most satisfactory of this world's manifold trials, because no blame could be attached to it. Mrs. Wincombe was only too anxious to sympathise with all her children, but with the exception of William they had such very peculiar sorrows and they didn't seem to understand when she spoke of a divine intention. Zara would stare at her blankly and ask awkward questions, while Jane always changed the conversation. Still Jane was, on the whole, a satisfactory example of what a heavily subsidised Providence could do. Mrs. Wincombe did not, of course, qualify in this fashion the Power on which she im-

plicitly relied, but she helped it in the right direction by insistent temporal appeals.

Zara picked up a stool and placed it near the small lovely feet which would have had an easier road had they chosen to accompany the peregrinations of anyone but John Wincombe. Mother and daughter talked in undertones and Zara, tired and dispirited, confided the fear which beset her. "I don't believe he particularly wants to get well. Sometimes, I think he positively resents it. It's as if he'd gone too far in another direction and couldn't get back. You know his heart actually stopped beating."

Mrs. Wincombe spoke of a spirit recalled from the brink of heaven, as if paradise were a bathing-pool where lost souls might obtain a much-needed wash, but Zara was accustomed to considering the spirit of Christopher-Carlyon, since no one who lived with him could possibly attach much importance to his body. She had been known to say that he was the only possible argument for the continuity of the former element after the dissolution of the latter and there were moments when she really believed it, for nobody in their senses could imagine that Christopher's body was the sum total of himself. Consequently, she answered her mother in much the same language and saw nothing incongruous in it. Mrs. Wincombe was happy, for she felt she was of use. She loved her children to excess, but she was apt to spread her tenderness in the wrong places and to be surprised when one or other of her family, stumbling over it, objected to her lack of understanding.

"We must have faith," she said, "and that new man

John got down from Edinburgh is supposed to be amazingly clever," from which it will be seen that her religion was diluted with common sense.

The Cambridge Blue looked in for a cocktail and because he obviously wanted to talk to her alone, Zara gave him one in the Library. "The Family are enthroned all over the first floor," she said, sinking on to a sofa with an air of weariness which seemed to take from him all the Zara that he had once possessed.

He sat on the back of the sofa and talked to her about Christopher till she said impatiently, "No, no, I don't want to discuss him. It's like being in a cage. Tell me about the plays you've seen, and what you've been reading, and have there been any more shows of still-life sliding off Alpine tables? I'm in the mood to understand post-everything pictures, provided they're sufficiently discordant."

The man offered her a cigarette and lit it. "D'you realise I haven't seen you, to speak of, since that ridiculous affair on the Embankment?"

"There hasn't been time," said Zara in defiance of the calendar.

"You might have telephoned."

"I did mean to,—I really did, but I hadn't a moment."

The Cambridge Blue regarded his lighter as if it were a new invention. He began to realise the place he had occupied in Zara's life. "We were pretty good friends," he said, "I might have been of some use," and relentless memory drew pictures that were certainly not of friendship.

"We are friends," retorted Zara, "we always shall

be, I hope, but I haven't time now for anyone or anything but Christopher. I'm obsessed by him."

The Cambridge Blue, fearful of losing her altogether, turned the conversation towards the subjects in which she used to be interested and Zara listened as if she were on the other side of a screen. There were great gaps in her attention. At last the man could stand it no longer. "Well, I'm dining at the other end of nowhere, so I'd better be going."

Zara got up immediately and for a moment, ignoring his hand, she clung to him as if he were a piece of furniture. "I am so terribly worried," she said.

Administering such comfort as occurred to his essentially practical mind, the man remembered that they had never pretended to be in love. Theirs was to be the perfect relationship without responsibility. As he selected his hat from among a number in the hall, he had sufficient sense of humour to acknowledge the score against him.

Zara, who had been inclined to reproach herself for neglect, was relieved to be acquitted by what she imagined his indifference. After all, they had never imagined themselves more than friends in experimental modern fashion and she went upstairs to unpack a red silk dressing-gown she had bought for Christopher-Carlyon.

As soon as the invalid had recovered from the shock of his removal to Park Lane—in one of John's overcoats and a Rolls-Royce—London came to visit him, chiefly because it was sorry for Zara. The Well-Known Woman sent flowers wired in a basket, with a carefully worded note, which she thought might possibly

remind one of the sisters of the imminence of Aintree, where John, of course, had a house.

Cerberus was a constant visitor and he made Christopher read. "You're suffering from atrophy." he boomed, but it was gentle compared with the roar in which he told Zara, "You must get the fellow interested. In that absurd dressing-gown, he looks like something condemned by the Inquisition."

"They didn't wear red," protested Zara, but Cerberus ignored the remark.

"You've got to feed his mind. It's plumb empty."

What he really meant was that pain had taken away Christopher's past, so that he was like a man suffering from loss of memory. Everything had the same value, because there was nothing with which he could compare it. Christopher's life at that time was divided into before and after the Pain. The first period was confused and he did not care to disentangle a mass of what he felt was immaterial detail. The second was one of such intense relief, that in the absense of the suffering which had sharpened every sense, he was conscious only of acquiescence.

The Interesting Woman did something to stir him from the lethargy in which he felt safe. She made him laugh and she spoke of future diversions as if they couldn't happen without him.

"I'm sorry to be so dilatory," she told him from the doorway, "but I'd mislaid my waistline and I had to go to Paris to find it."

She wore a scarlet tippet, the only one in London, and she told Christopher of its effect on the Ritz, making him feel thoroughly mundane and in the swim.

The Authoress made several gifts of her time, which was her most precious possession. She was witty and kind and full of the most ingenious stories, but she couldn't help being just a trifle disappointed, for here was Christopher-Carlyon recovering and Zara would have been so interesting as a widow. She might have married the long young man whose hair got mixed up with his eyebrows. Marriages were the sport at which the Authoress excelled, but she had a delicate touch and it distressed her, when her sense of humour was in abeyance, to contemplate the miscarriage of her plans for Christopher and Zara. Nevertheless, she looked after them both with a delicious pertinacity. And all the bright young people who contributed to the popularity of the Press wrote charming things about Zara in more frequent paragraphs than were warranted by her social prominence, in order that she should not feel out of it.

The Jew, who had been in evidence at any hour of the day or night at which Zara might be likely to need him, during the first week when Christopher halted between the will of his doctors and his instinctive rejections of it, disappeared as soon as he was pronounced out of danger.

"You've got him back," he said, "it's up to you to make it worth while," and he took the girl's hand in both of his as if he wanted to reassure her.

Zara remembered the comfortable feeling with which, as a child, she had knelt in front of the rich purple curtain in her mother's church to listen to a distant and quite incomprehensible benediction.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

At Maurden, Christopher re-established most of his contacts with life. January and February were wet, but there was much to do inside the house. Mending tapestry or stretching brocade on a frame which he had made himself, Christopher-Carlyon looked like one of the attenuated young men in a mediæval drawing, especially as he insisted on wearing the crimson dressing-gown over his clothes. "It's the nearest I can get to a cardinal's robes," he told Zara, who felt, when she looked at his transparent flesh, that she must gather up as many hours as possible and give them to Christopher to play with.

Such small things made him happy. Zara found a permanent lump established in her throat. Had he always wanted so little? She imagined herself in the position of Emerson's days, offering "bread, kingdoms, stars and the sky which holds them all," whereas what her husband wanted was a tassel for the end of a bell-rope, or it might be something scarlet for a bedspread.

In those days, Zara accepted the allowance which Jane paid into her bank without previous notice or subsequent reminder. Christopher's salary had ceased with his activity at the Brewery and it had not occurred to Mr. Hilary that board and lodging might not be an adequate substitute.

There were still a number of expenses connected with his son's illness. Zara paid them out of her brother-in-law's money and she didn't care. So long as Christopher-Carlyon were happy, she would not question the means by which her objective was secured.

Meanwhile, her pity kept pace with her love, for she felt the man had been cheated. He could have filled the great rôles of which he dreamed. Perhaps he had filled them in previous existences. The castle encouraged such fancies, because it was difficult to measure finality within its walls. The Christopher of to-day was no more than a link among the many other Christophers who had gone into the making of Maurden and of the race subservient to it.

Zara, returning from one of the long walks with which she kept herself in condition to hold the balance between hope and fear, looked up at the mass of the Gate-Tower. It was formidable and unfeeling, like a lighthouse defying an ocean, only in this case the breakers were the years and the swell the surge of life which broke against the walls without affecting them.

It was a curious existence which these two passed in a tower having as Christopher repeated, no sort of connection with the rest of the castle. "It's like a siege," he explained, making coffee in front of a fire which smoked whenever the wind thought fit to invade the chimney, "but we can hold out indefinitely. I like to think of the flag just over my head."

Zara had a sudden vision of the standard at half-mast. She could not believe that Christopher felt as well as he would have liked her to imagine, but they

never talked about his health. On the contrary, they made plans for many years ahead. The man had once been to America and spent some weeks in a log cabin on the edge of a forest. It was the only time he had been able to satisfy an elemental sense of fitness, which to him was represented equally by a shack in the wilderness or the steps of a throne.

"Some day we must go back to my cabin. Last time I saw it, the lake was frozen, and a man who was with me played a violin out there on the ice in the moonlight. The stillness was terrible. Even the trees were listening." Christopher's face expressed the remembered rapture which he could not put into words. "It was terrifyingly beautiful. D'you know the feeling when life is just a great ache bursting out of you? Beauty can be too big and then something's got to break."

Zara felt it might be her heart, which she visualised as a bivalve with a split in the middle, so she suggested a sortie from their beleaguered citadel. Christopher-Carlyon would not go for a walk, unless it had a definite purpose, so Zara had to invent a new one each day.

"You must look at the Yew Walk. If it had a flagged path it would be so much more romantic. The ghost must have worn out a good many pairs of shoes on the gravel."

But this was not one of her best inventions for there was a cold wind and Christopher's lips went grey while he lingered under the branches, so old that they were as the arms of skeletons stretched out in meagre defiance. When Christopher-Carlyon felt cold, his ideas froze

his blood. It took him a whole day to get warm again. Zara was frightened, for he would shut himself up in a room for whose walls he was making a frame to be hung with crimson damask, and there would be long intervals between the bursts of hammering. The woman waiting outside the door wondered whether it would be wise, or even fair, to interrupt, for man has established a right to privacy. It is perhaps his last defence against emancipation and equality and all the other scarecrows with which we have gone into battle, for what we do not want.

In a wing which crept out towards the ruined banqueting hall, the older Hilarys lived an equally soundproof life. It was extraordinary how noise died at Maurden. Every room was hung with something tattered and only the wind whispered in the galleries.

Mrs. Hilary was an embittered woman who felt that life was about to take from her the last thing for which she cared, but she would not acknowledge her fear. It would have brought her on to a level with Zara and she disliked her daughter-in-law.

Mr. Hilary resented the additional items on the tradesmen's accounts. "The fellow's positively swilling milk," he grumbled. "And that chit probably bathes in it!"

He spoke to the cowman and, thereafter, Zara bought whatever Christopher needed from a farm. It gave her an excuse for her walks and the farmer's wife was sympathetic. She always asked after "the young squire" and sometimes she sent him a present of ducks' eggs because they were "powerful nourishing."

February gave way to March and the hills were

still swept with rain, but the winds fought Armageddon with army corps of clouds. The effect from the tower windows held Christopher enthralled. As he watched a mass attack, he thought of Napoleon at the head of his cavalry.

The two sections of the Hilary family met for meals whenever Christopher could be induced to remember them. More often Zara, who had made a treaty with the harassed cook went to the kitchen at odd hours and returned with suitable provender on a tray. In the evenings they experimented with orchestral music on a gramophone provided by John. Christopher-Carlyon sat at the feet of the instrument, which was superlative, and tended it as if it were the newest thing in gods. Sometimes Zara read aloud, but her fellow-recluse would not listen to anything new. It was as if he were trying to entrench himself within the bounds of familiarity. He did not want to be disturbed by fresh assaults on his brain. It was tired, so he let it drift on the currents of his imagination.

So the days slipped one into another and Zara, accustomed to the hollows under Christopher's cheek-bones and the angles on which his clothes hung, did not realise that though he had certainly got much better, he was not getting well. Habit had staled the edge of her fear. April scattered primroses over the rough grass with which Maurden refuted the idea of a park, and Christopher, recovering spirits but not flesh, went out into the fitful sunshine inadequately clothed. Zara ran after him with a muffler and he turned on her, not crossly, but with amazement. "How dare you worry me with such nonsense?"

His wife realised how slight was her hold and consequently, how limited her opportunities to be of use to him. She laughed an apology.

Several times that winter the Cambridge Blue had found occasion to motor into Kent. Once Zara had lunched with him at a neighbouring inn, but generally she limited their intercourse to a walk over the seaward slopes. She was on those occasions cheerful and impersonal. The man had not been able to cross the barrier she had, quite unconsciously, erected.

One morning in early April he appeared without warning and, as Christopher-Carlyon was particularly occupied, he managed to induce Zara to motor with him along the coast. During the previous month he had sent her several books and she commented on them as they drove, but after an early lunch the man insisted on walking up to some beech-woods from which there was a famous view. The day wore a coat-of-mail. The fields and the tree-trunks were polished after the recent rain and there was a gleam in the air as of burnished metal. The two walked quickly and Zara, keeping pace with those immensely long legs and a brain which measured and discarded in the fewest possible words, felt that she had been dawdling for months. Her mind quickened with her blood and soon they were involved in the old impersonally intimate discussions.

"You've changed," said the man.

"I've concentrated," retorted Zara. "I've become monotheistic."

The Cambridge Blue smiled at her from the height where he became kin to the ruggedness of the beeches.

"Pantheism is much safer. If you worship enough gods, you may quite likely hit on the right one among them."

Zara shook her head. A felt hat was crushed over her unruly hair and, in it, she looked preternaturally sober like one of our grandmothers playing with age and a matron's cap at thirty.

"I've done with idols," she said. "I made such a lot of them and each had a different mask. It really was clever to make so much out of nothing."

She thought of the Beast which had turned out to be quite a pleasant domestic companion and she laughed at the tall young man who strode beside her, because his was not a typically domestic outlook.

"What's the joke?"

"The taming of a wanton," she said, but would not explain.

"When are you coming to dine with me again?" asked the Cambridge Blue.

Zara spoke of Christopher. "I couldn't possibly leave him," she said in a voice which had the finality of John Wincombe's conscience.

"But you're not going to bury yourself down here for the rest of your life?"

"Of course not. John's lent us his yacht and as soon as it's a bit warmer, we're going off on it, over the edge of the world. Christopher needs a change. It'll make an utterly different person of him."

As soon as she had said it, Zara was frightened. So she wanted somebody different. And if Christopher did not get well, what then?

The Cambridge Blue had looked surprised.

"What's the matter? Don't you think he looks better?"

The man lied. There was nothing else he could do.

They continued their walk, and on the top of the hill they stopped by unexpressed consent, to look at England. Quite a lot of it was visible, all well-ordered and complacent. Zara wanted, suddenly and quite desperately, to get away from it, and at that moment the man put his arms round her. She struggled against them, not because she particularly minded, but because they meant nothing one way or another. She felt the muscles tighten and knew herself powerless, so she accepted the man's kisses without further protest, surprised that she had once been thrilled by them.

Passion had appeared to be an essential portion of their friendship and here was the friendship strong as ever, so far as she was concerned, but the tang had gone out of it. The Cambridge Blue was no longer necessary to her.

"Um, you *have* changed," he said, smiling over his own discomfiture. "This is going to have a terrible effect on my self-assurance."

"Sorry," said Zara, "but nothing's altered. Kisses aren't really of much importance, are they?"

"What'll you do when there's nothing left to destroy?" asked the man, unexpectedly.

"What on earth d'you mean? What have I destroyed?" and her mind leaped from one convention to another, or were they morals? Then she thought of Christopher-Carlyon, but the Christopher of to-day was no idol, unless the whole of service be idolatry.

"A good many of my habits," said the man, feeling

that under the circumstances the ground was perhaps insecure. He could not believe that the sensations which were still uncomfortably alive in himself could have died in Zara. She's upset, he told himself after the manner of mankind who, from biblical ages, have announced "The Maid is not dead but sleepeth" when ever they do not wish to acknowledge the inevitable.

On the way back they talked of a philosophical work which had recently been translated from the German.

"It is definitely constructive, that is what I like about it," said Zara. "What is the use of pulverising things which are already broken? That seems to me the fault of most modern writers. In the last chapter they attempt to build a bungalow where they have destroyed a temple."

The Cambridge Blue disagreed and discussion followed. "I'm so glad we are interested in the same things," said the man when they both felt mentally dishevelled.

"It's fun, isn't it, but I expect, one day, we shall find we've talked ourselves out—a couple of deflated balloons, what prospect could be more humiliating?"

"Unfortunately," retorted the Cambridge Blue, "I get a thrill whenever I see you."

"It won't last," said Zara and hoped she was not becoming cynical. But it was amazing the number of things she had, without any difficulty, forgotten. Ten years ago there had been so much which she felt was unendurable. Now there were no boundaries to her tolerance. She was indifferent to anything which did not affect Christopher-Carlyon and it was this excep-

tion alone which redeemed her passivity. "What are you thinking about?" asked the Cambridge Blue.

"Whether there is such a condition as active cynicism."

The man denied the suggestion. "Of course not. It's the last round, when life has got you down and the count is out against you. Cynicism is acquiescence without participation."

They were crossing a road at the moment and they narrowly escaped being run down by a Rolls-Royce. "There is something very familiar about that car," said Zara.

When they returned to Maurden, they found the Rolls outside the gate. Its owner must have had a sense of what was appropriate, for he had evidently walked up to the house and seen it rising from the empty moat, complete and detached instead of cut into kaleidoscopic squares by the windows of a car. Its bricks were the colour of pale roses, but there was nothing flower-like about the castle. It was too ancient and, in spite of its ruin, too stable. Deep-rooted in the earth, from which it drew a life of its own, it was so much part of Southern England that it might have been one of her cliffs, or a grove of those immemorial trees which knew the Druids and the defeat of Rome.

Zara took casual leave of the Cambridge Blue and, remembering that this was the day of affliction, when the castle was open to the public, she made for a postern by which it was possible to reach the Gate-Tower. As she turned the handle, she looked back over her shoulder, without reason and without con-

scious volition. The Jew was walking slowly back to his car. Zara ran after him.

"I did not want to disturb you," he said, "I'm a tourist, like the rest."

"If there is one thing in earth and heaven that is certain," said Zara, "it is that you will never be like the rest."

She was immensely glad to see him. She took him back through the Great Hall, wherein gaped the inquisitive, to a white parlour, and here, in the absence of her parents-in-law, she ordered tea.

"Everybody is out," she said, "even Christopher. He's actually gone to see some neighbours—the inducement was tapestry. I hope it won't tire him too much." She spoke at once of her anxiety. "It seems as if he held everything at the end of a thread, so lightly, between his finger-tips. At any moment, he might let go."

"There are possibly other threads, which you do not see."

The light slipped out of the octagonal room with its faded Italian furniture and the hangings which the years had drained of colour, but Zara did not notice it. The Jew made her feel as if she were part of a general purpose. She was no longer "on the shelf," an object dusty and discontented after years of misuse.

"Now I am all neatly mended and spring-cleaned," she told him. "They ought to make you Minister of Public Waste. Did I offer you a cigarette, I'm not sure that I have any, so perhaps you'd better offer me one instead."

"There is no waste," said the Jew, producing a

platinum case. "The threads are all essential to the same design, but most of us see no more than the wrong side of the pattern." He reflected, "I imagine that what we call death is just the reversing of the canvas."

For a couple of hours they talked in the White Parlour, but afterwards Zara could not remember that they had said anything important. Yet she met Christopher with shining eyes and was unaffected by his depression.

"How people can live in such places!" he said. "The tapestry was gorgeous, but it was horribly ashamed of everything else in what they call the gallery."

"Who was there?" asked Zara. She felt she would like to see lots of people and stay up all night talking to them.

"A crowd," returned Christopher. "I didn't notice particularly. I'm not good at parties."

"You could be if you tried."

"Why should I try? What can it possibly matter?"

Zara reflected. "I think it does matter," she said, "I don't like being inadequate. It's odd how much 'trying' is necessary." Christopher-Carlyon interrupted, "But they were dreadful people," he said.

## CHAPTER XXIX

THE yacht did a good deal for them. The weather was appropriate and a series of what Christopher called "blue days" raised their spirits till they felt masters of the future as well as the past. It was an agreeable sensation and one to which Zara had been, comparatively, a stranger.

Since the Mediterranean was theirs, cut out and presented to them by John's cheques they wandered along the African coast, calling at the less frequented ports. The colour which blazed at them in sunsets and in a froth of almond blossom, the way the red sand was tucked about the feet of the palms so that they looked like shaving-brushes wrapped in cotton-wool, the mud villages with indigo-robed women standing in the doorways, the smell of age and dung which stole out into the evenings, the way men rode on donkeys perched sideways on the last notch of the spine so that there was no reason for their stability, the howl of pariahs and a shepherd fluting to his fat-tailed sheep—all these were mixed up in Christopher's mind and he felt rich. The thread was apparently thickening.

One day they tried a longer expedition than usual, motoring far into the desert and returning when the moon had drawn the shadows of the blind-walled houses in amethyst on amber. Christopher had been enthusiastic for several consecutive hours, and for the

first time Zara began to wonder if, in spite of the doctors, a miracle had been wrought. After all they had said the operation was successful.

Then, sitting on deck with the moon still flaunting her splendour but a trifle heavily as a matron weary of her diamonds, Christopher began to talk of his funeral.

"I've planned it all," he said, "and you must promise to do exactly what I tell you. It must be by torchlight and the procession must go on foot through the bracken. All the Hilarys are buried in the church where we were married. And I want red roses, heaps of them, and you're to wear red."

The clarity which instantaneously penetrated the places in Zara's mind where hope had dared to grow colourlessly in the dark, was like a searchlight. In its relentless glare she realised that Christopher was taking it all for granted. He had never thought he was going to get well.

She remembered the smallest of their plans and she moved abruptly, in order to cover the sound which broke from her lips. But Christopher did not notice. He was talking quite happily.

"I couldn't be put under all that earth. It would be so cold—think of it. I want to stay in the private chapel—you know, where the trees look in at the grille—"

Zara felt as if her heart was being cut out of her body and it was an unromantic process causing an extremity of sickness. She wanted the violence of movement, to throw herself against something hard, to run into the wind and the night till she left behind the pain which was like acid on metal. But she sat

very still and smiled at Christopher as if they were playing a game. It was all she could do for him.

During the succeeding weeks, when it became more and more obvious that the sun and the sea were powerless to do anything for Christopher's body, Zara moulded herself into the part assigned to her by her husband. In the process she imagined that she was losing whatever remained of her youth, but in fact her vitality was greatly increased by the life she was forced to lead and, with it, her capacity for suffering. Zara could not get away from it. There was no end to it.

Superficially she smiled and talked, moved wherever Christopher-Carlyon wanted to go, stimulated his imagination, encouraged his fantasies, made plans with him which she knew would never be carried out, decorated herself for his pleasure and offered him just as much love as he cared to accept. Underneath this carefully cultivated manner she felt the desperation of an animal in a trap.

At the end of May, the Pain returned. It flung Christopher into a chair as the yacht drifted up the Spanish coast and he called sharply to Zara.

His wife was leaning over the rail watching a porpoise. It was a Columbus rolling steadily towards America. Zara wondered how long it would take to cross the Atlantic and whether fish had accents. It would be a very superior porpoise—possibly it would give lectures about its travels. Christopher's appeal disturbed an imaginary encounter between this piscine Columbus and a swordfish. How did porpoises defend themselves?

Zara turned to find her husband rigid in a deck-chair. His body looked as if it were on the rack, and in his face there was an expression which she had not previously seen. Instantly she was beside him, but she dared not touch him. "What is it? What is it?" she repeated.

Christopher did not answer in words, but he looked at her with eyes suddenly uncurtained. Zara shivered in the sunshine. She had known terror blunted by egotism, she had seen it in a hundred different aspects when she was a child, but they were decently camouflaged and they admitted of doubt or hope, but here was terror naked and she knew that Christopher-Carlyon had no fear of death.

The attack passed, leaving the image of a man spent in the sunset. The yacht was making for Algeciras. Its passengers would take the first train to Paris or London. They must get home. At that moment Maurden was to both of them a fortress from which they might defy the enemy.

"We shall be in by morning and then it's only forty-eight hours," said Zara optimistically.

Christopher-Carlyon refused to go below. He lay in the deck-house and watched the stars. His wife sat very close to him and he touched her now and then as if to be sure she was real.

"It would be awful if I lost you," he said suddenly. "You do know how much I love you, don't you."

"Of course," prevaricated Zara, who had often wondered if he loved her at all.

And then the barriers went down. Christopher explained the terror which gibbered through his days

and nights. "Nobody could mind dying. That's nothing," he said, "but every man wants to die whole and sane. That was the horror of the war. It broke men and they died in bits, each one horribly. The manhood they took into the trenches was destroyed by probe and scalpel. The Japanese were more merciful. They used the needle."

Zara reached for his hand. It was cold, but it responded to her pressure. So they remained, hand in hand, while Christopher dissected the Pain. It was something to be able to treat it like an anatomical specimen on a lecture platform.

"It is different from anything you can imagine. It is so terribly personal. One could endure a crucifix because it would be something to fight, but this thing is inside one, part of one. It saps the will to contest it. D'you understand?"

Zara's grip tightened. She remembered certain hours between afternoon and midnight in the house off the King's Road. "I know," she said, "it wants to make cowards of us. It wants to get us down," and she thought that she could not bear this to happen to Christopher-Carlyon. She would not let it happen.

It was at this moment that she made up her mind. He should not die in bits, like the men who came back from the trenches to endure the miracles of science. They had conquered in Flanders, but defeat waited in the operating theatre, where the bits that might have died grandly, even gaily, were put into puling shape and weary things emerged from them, to die not once, but a dozen times under the sickened misery of those

who loved them. Christopher-Carlyon should be saved from this.

He was speaking deliberately of morphia. "They don't give enough," he said. "They let everything die but one's body and who cares about that? It's a fetish and a jolly expensive one."

"In your case, it's an adorable one," said Zara, "I wish mine were half as nice," but Christopher refused the bait.

"If only I could be quite sure—" he began and stopped abruptly.

"Sure of what?" prompted the woman who was pressing against him.

"Pain is so terribly indecent," said the man, "it strips one of all privacy. One becomes horrible to oneself and everyone else."

Zara protested. She used all the old, still beautiful shibboleths which she felt were somehow connected with religion, so that she, personally, had no right to them.

Christopher smiled. "The symbol of a crucible presupposes courage. Without it, pain is more like a garbage-tin. Different bits and pieces are thrown into it but their decay is equally rank."

"You have more courage than anyone I know," insisted his wife.

"That's why I am so afraid," said Christopher with disarming simplicity. "Supposing it failed?"

"It couldn't," said Zara. "It shan't."

"One mislays a number of qualities when the doctors get their knives into one," reflected the man, but

talking about his terror had, for the moment, alienated it. Like a foreigner, uncertain of welcome, fear stood some distance away and looked on.

Meanwhile the two who shared the intimacy of a condemned cell spoke sparingly of the possibility of escape. There might have to be another operation.

"What would be the use of it?" asked Christopher. "I'd so much rather let the thing do its worst and be damned. I'll have a few more good hours and then—if only it'll be quick."

"It shall be," said Zara to herself and she wondered how much morphia would be needed and how she could get it.

Instinctively she thought of the Jew. He had always helped her. Then she remembered the theory he had postulated in the white parlour. If a thread were snapped at the wrong moment the whole pattern might suffer. Anger sent the blood into her cheeks. No man had the right to judge for his fellows.

It was then that she promised Christopher "Darling, you shan't be hurt one fraction more than you choose to bear. It's not difficult to get a drug. I know how it can be arranged. You shall have the bottle beside you all the time and I'll be there too, if you want me."

"Of course I want you," said Christopher, but his mind toyed with the idea of release. "Are you sure you can get the stuff?"

"Of course," said Zara and she set up her plan as if it were a dummy and proceeded to stuff it with supplementary reassurance.

"It won't be so bad if you know you can get away whenever you like," she said and wondered why each

word did not leave a visible scar. "If ever the pain is unendurable, I swear it shall end."

Christopher-Carlyon looked at her with the eyes of a small boy. He had always believed in Zara. She was his wife. It would never have occurred to him that she could be anything but trustworthy. It would be impossible for her to let him down. "What a relief!" he said, "I don't mind anything but—" he sought for words, "a sort of moral disintegration while I'm still supposed to be alive."

On the journey across Spain he was comparatively cheerful, but when they reached Paris he had to go to bed for several days. Jane, to whom Zara had wired from Algeciras, arrived by aeroplane and John followed in the *Golden Arrow*. Thereafter, all that could possibly be done for Christopher-Carlyon was effected with the minimum apparent effort and the maximum expense.

Zara and her husband pleaded for Maurden. They were rather like two children sharing a secret. They hugged it to them and in the complicity of their glances, they exchanged the security with which it embued them. Without it, they couldn't have borne the routine in which they found themselves involved, for it was to Park Lane they went and a further operation was immediately ordained.

"There's a new treatment," said John, who was always loud-voiced when he was particularly kind. "Something to do with light." He spoke as if the operation were negligible, a mere clearing of the undergrowth to let in the super-ray whose healing properties were undoubted.

Christopher, in the scarlet dressing-gown, with the cope as a bedspread, had ceased to protest. After all, what did it matter? Zara would fulfill her promise.

She came in with her arms full of flowers—she wouldn't buy lilies—and Christopher's eyes held a question.

She nodded, "Yes, I've got it," and she showed him several little bottles.

By the dint of intelligent lying, she had acquired half a dozen prescriptions for narcotics, after which it was only necessary to have them made up by different chemists. Whether the effect would have been what she supposed, is a question which did not occur to Zara. She believed that, at considerable risk to herself, for it would never have entered her head to deny what she had done, she could give Christopher-Carlyon the release to which he was entitled.

"Thank God," said the queerly hollow figure which scarcely shaped the splendour of its covering and immediately his eyes wandered to the roses. "They're like velvet," he said, "and the scent of them!"

Zara put them into his hands and realised that he had never touched her with such passion. A pang shot through her. If she were to lose Christopher-Carlyon, it would be something which she could not measure for it had never been wholly in her possession. The heart of the man she had chosen to love was enchanted ground. She had imagined that marriage would make her free of it. Later, she sought desperately for some quality which would give her right of entry. At last, she had been content to know the magic was there beside her, on the edge of her knowledge. In its

proximity life held strange promises, but if Christopher were to die, they would never be fulfilled. Zara felt that she herself would be filed down to a core of hard fact. The glamour would be gone. It would be like living in a dictionary.

"Let me put them in water," she said, smiling. "They match your dressing-gown. You look like a pope in one of Inges' pictures, or are they judges? I know his reds are incomparable."

With great care, she arranged the roses in a Waterford bowl. Then because sunshine was pouring into the room and the noise of Park Lane was like a hive jealous of its honey, they made plans for an immediate return to Maurden.

"It's a very slight operation," said Zara and Christopher nodded.

"I've been thinking," he said, "it isn't really necessary to rebuild the whole of the Southern front. I shall strip the ivy and there are enough of the old bricks to replace the battlements. One tower is intact you know, so it would be easy to copy it at the other end."

"Would you have glass in the windows?" asked Zara.

She did not leave him for the rest of the day and she found an immense amount to suggest or discuss, so that by the evening they were drawing plans of the Southern front.

The following day Christopher died without recovering consciousness after the operation. Zara unlocked a drawer and looked at a row of small bottles. She might have had more faith, but in what?

## CHAPTER XXX

During the following year there was hardly an hour in which Christopher-Carlyon was absent from Zara's thoughts. In those months she possessed him far more fully than when he was alive.

After the operation, she went into the bedroom and saw what they had the impertinence to say was Christopher-Carlyon lying on an incredibly neat bed. She remembered how void he had always looked when he was asleep. Sometimes she had been afraid that he would never wake up. There was no difference between Christopher asleep and Christopher dead. His mouth hung slightly open. It was defenceless, because there was no smile to hide its weakness. Zara remembered how Christopher used to come into a room, quickly and eagerly, as if he were sure of finding something nice in it. She remembered the amused kindling of his eyes when they met hers, as if in them all sorts of memories were burning. The pain in her chest was intolerable, but she did not connect it with the figure on the bed. Christopher-Carlyon had been a flame, and it had gone out.

Mrs. Wincombe, who hung about the house in Park Lane, immersed in black and a watery kindness, was shocked at Zara's attitude. For her, The Body was of immense importance. She spoke of it in capitals, with

a reverence she would certainly never have accorded to Christopher-Carlyon alive.

To Zara, the mould which lay under the crimson cope was something which had once, most inadequately, protected her husband from the assaults of an outrageous fortune—at best a coat of mail, torn with enemy darts.

In spite of her iconoclasm, she was sufficiently superstitious to insist on a funeral in keeping with Christopher's plans. She wore the red dress which he had demanded and, under a blaze of candles, the church was heaped with red roses. A summer storm broke as the coffin went slowly through the bracken, borne shoulder high by gardners and the estate carpenter. The torches flickered and went out. In darkness, the procession blundered along the familiar path. Zara did not feel the rain. She remembered the first time they had walked up to the church, Christopher so eager to explain the future and the past, that he went sideways through the village. She heard herself saying, "Do let's—" in front of the altar and saw the red in Christopher's cheeks. She remembered their strange engagement and the evening they had clung together, while a frightened Christopher said, "Supposing there is nothing in me?" But there had been a great deal, courage and gaiety and imagination.

Inside the church, the same callow clergyman intoned "dust unto dust" and then something about the flesh. Zara remembered the wedding-service and her fantastic dress. She had imagined herself standing on the edge of revelation. "Ye twain shall be one Flesh," but they had never been anything like it. What a lot

of importance the church attributed to flesh. "Ye twain shall be one spirit," would be much more to the point. There were moments when Christopher and she had been one spirit. A gust blew in through the open door. It stirred the roses and extinguished one of the tapers. Zara connected it with Christopher. All the colour in the church and all the flames belonged to him. If he still existed it would be in the errantry of the wind. What a fuss they were making about the body for which he had never had any use.

That night Zara motored back to London. She would not stay at Maurden. The castle had got what it wanted, the body of another Hilary. It could gloat over its kill. Up to the last moment Christopher's thoughts had been of the Southern Front. Zara looked back at it, she hoped for the last time, and saw the ivy surging over the broken parapet, as if it were a wave, which in the glutinous suction of its ebb must drag mortar and bricks apart. She would not return. Maurden could have the thing they had placed so pompously behind the grill of the private chapel. The ceremony had no meaning for Zara except in so far that there had been a strong personal relationship between Christopher and each of his possessions. His body might be numbered among them since the wick which starves or feeds it, is the property of the flame.

Zara, driving through the night, took Christopher-Carlyon with her. In a thousand memories she reconstructed the man as she had first known him, till she made, laboriously, a patchwork pattern of Christopher, all gay pieces embroidered with his smile and his beautiful eagerness and the clean, unbroken lines of

him. If Zara thought of his body it was as of something which had failed him and which his fastidiousness had discarded under the crimson cope.

That portion of London which centred round John's houses and John's wife exhibited suitable distress. The Well-Known Woman sent a particularly fine wreath because she couldn't get it out of her head that Zara might marry the Jew. After his last gift to the Nation, the man could hardly evade a peerage. The Bright Young People were shocked, because Christopher had been very ornamental. They felt their pens were hardly adequate to the occasion, so they telephoned a number of confused condolences and refrained from several cocktail parties.

The Authoress wrote a charming letter from a châlet several thousand feet above the Rhone, but it indicated the fact that the end of a chapter was not necessarily the conclusion of the novel. Zara was touched by the length and scope of the pages, into which the Authoress had put understanding and a wise, constructive sympathy, but she couldn't help wondering if she were not regarded as character which might at last, at the seventy-thousandth word, come to its senses. Zara had not lost her sense of humour. She thought how much Christopher would have appreciated the letter.

The Peer, who was still unmarried, sent arum lilies and unctuous hot-house grapes which reminded Zara of harvest festivals and such fat bishops that they might quite well have been cooks. Bishops should certainly be thin.

The Interesting Woman was practical as well as

kind. "Widelands is yours," she said. "Make whatever use of it you like, but if I were you, Zara, I should go somewhere entirely new. Why not join Robert in Paris?"

Privately, she thought that if this unconsciously destructive widow would not wear mourning and would not conform to any of the conventions expected of her, she would be better out of sight. For the Interesting Woman believed that Zara had a Future and she wanted her to inherit it unhampered by Talk.

Cerberus constituted himself guardian of the home in Park Lane. It is not certain that he slept there, but he arrived at an early hour and left at a late one. By exercising a strict censorship, he protected Zara from all the people who wanted to know "how she was taking it" and from those others who soppily suggested "helping her to bear it."

The Cambridge Blue was in evidence when needed. He had retained a definite position in Zara's life by transforming their passionate friendship into an association for the purposes of mental research! Two or three times a week, while she was on the yacht, Zara received the sort of letters which made her feel interesting and interested. They had to be answered at once, because they provided so many discutable points. Christopher read most of them and suggested further correspondence. He appreciated the "long fellow's brain." "It's tropical," he said, "but, with such fertile theories, he'll have to keep busy with an axe."

The Cambridge Blue answered Zara's note from Paris by coming to the station to meet the imposing arrival of John and John's relatives. He received no

more than a smile and a hurried pressure of the arm. "It was nice of you," said Zara and the man, who was not impressionable, was shocked by her expression. He did not see her again till after Christopher's death. While he was alive she had neither time nor inclination to do more than telephone a message of thanks for his services, which took practical shape. But when Christopher-Carlyon had no further need of his wife's reassurance, the Cambridge Blue was allowed to see her. She sat in a low chair, her head thrown back, but she was alert and on her guard. Her lips were the gaolers of her thoughts.

"I wish you'd let me help," said the man. "Can't I do anything?"

He meant, "Am I nothing to you?" and Zara knew it, but she could not respond. "At present, I don't want anyone," she said. "It's all too big."

She thought that sympathy should be limited to the minor incidents of life, the tears and breaks that can so easily be mended. No subscription fund of pity would be of much use after an earthquake. Because she was sorry for anyone whose state approached the desolation in which she existed, and suffering had sharpened her appreciation of other people's miseries, she tried to explain this to the Cambridge Blue. She succeeded in making him feel small. Shrunk in his own opinion, he left her, but he had sufficient strength of character to remain at her service. He indicated this in quite suitable words and proved it by subsequent actions.

The Jew's attitude was different. While Christopher was alive, he contented himself with a letter which, for no reason that she could discover, restored Zara's

confidence in herself. It convinced her that she was essential to Christopher-Carlyon and that nobody else had the right to impinge on her consciousness. This was, of course, what she most wanted to feel.

Later, Zara remembered sitting in various rooms with a comfortably silent man, whose thoughts went with her along strange roads which were never so rough as she expected. She could not remember any particular conversation, but the whole of the period between Christopher's death and her departure for France was like a series of photographs reflected on the same screen. She took for granted the fact of the Jew's presence. It was a necessary background to whatever she experienced. It focussed her reactions and brought them into relation, one with the other. Without him she could not have borne the surge of her own resentment, yet she was never conscious of him as an individual. He was no more than an ingredient which narcotised the draught she would otherwise have found intolerable.

It was Cerberus who saw Zara into the Continental train from Victoria, but William's young woman lingered in the rear. Mr. Wincombe had arrived much too early on the wrong platform and, in the act of buying a detective story as a parting gift for his daughter, he became absorbed in a pamphlet which had strayed on to the bookstall. So he remainded unaware of his error till Zara was on her way to Dover.

"I'm jolly glad that's over," said William. "She's taken it well. Surely she and Christopher can't have had anything much in common? When I showed him my new mare he said she had "very nice ankles."

Cerberus laughed. He appreciated Christopher's humour. "He ought to have been a younger son. Then he'd have made something for himself. As it was, the responsibility of inheritance obsessed him. He couldn't get away from the place to which he was obviously assigned."

"Surely she'll marry again," said William's Young Woman and added generously, "She's awfully good-looking."

"Zara good looking?" echoed Cerberus, surprised.

"Well, don't you thing so?" The speaker had a strong family feeling in which she was prepared to wrap all William's relations.

"I think," said Cerberus, "it is either a gross understatement or an exaggeration."

William's Young Woman did not know what he meant.

"But you agree with me that she'll re-marry?" It seemed to her, secure in the affection of William, that marriage was as essential as an eiderdown in cold weather. Nobody could be comfortable without it.

"I wonder," shrugged Cerberus and he thought, "She's not every man's meat, but it might be worth while being unhappy with her."

From all of which it may be seen that without any consciousness of evolution Zara had become something of a Personage.

It was Robert who first told her: "You're uncomfortably individual. What's happened to you?"

They had finished an excellent dinner in the Second Secretary's flat and the host had discarded his eyeglass. Leaning back with the elegance of a more leisured cen-

tury, Robert trifled with coffee and a cigarette. His sister was smoking through the long holder she affected.

"I've learned to compromise," she said. "But I should have thought that made for mass production. There's nothing so fluid as our modern tolerance."

Robert considered the point. "On the contrary," he suggested. "Our ancestors were always bewailing their failure to maintain an impossible standard. We accept a lower one, but we keep to it."

"Pursuit of the unattainable should encourage individuality," meditated Zara.

"Not if every Tom, Dick and Harry is pursuing the same highly respectable aim."

"Thank heaven, we are no longer respectable," said Zara. "That must have been worse than hip baths and corsets and hermetically sealed windows."

"Still there's nothing more comforting than a Pharisaical consciousness of superiority," said Robert. "When people think me a prig, I purr all over."

His sister laughed. "I don't think I shall ever again feel a prig, so I must be content without that particular comfort."

But she was wrong. Nine months after Christopher's death, she met a Hungarian. He was gentle and sensitive. He had a powerful head on a small, delicate body and a mouth which promised sensation. He fell in love with Zara and since she responded sufficiently to dine with him alone whenever he suggested it, he imagined the affair would develop along the lines indicated by Paris and a particularly riotous Spring. So he invited the lady who habitually wore red to tea in his flat. She came, knowing exactly what it meant.

A monosyllabic Magyar admitted her. There were liqueurs and long cigarettes and a couch which suggested intimacy. There was also tea—as an afterthought. Neither of them drank it.

The Hungarian was happy until he sensed in Zara a reaction which he did not understand. At first she let herself be kissed with that pliability of flesh and muscle which always enchanted her lovers. When the man's lips hesitated, she slipped out of his arms and sat on the floor at his feet, for it was not passion she wanted, but a tenderness which would momentarily fertilise the waste places within her. As she crouched beside him, her arms across his knee and her chin resting on them, he was aware of the distance between them.

Zara's mouth was rigid and there were lines at the corners of her nostrils. In repose, her face looked guarded. The man tried to draw her into his arms, but Zara resisted. "It is so nice like this. We are almost friends. Let us wait a minute."

The Hungarian complied. He gave her a cigarette and she smoked it leaning against his knees. She had thrown her hat on to a chair and, looking down at her, he noticed the way her hair grew on the well-shaped forehead. He wanted to touch her eyebrows which were narrow and disdainful.

While she smoked she talked in disjointed sentences as if she were picking her way among débris. "D'you know when you've suffered a great deal and when you wake up suddenly one morning and find the pain's gone? And you think it's been almost worth while, because of the sudden blesséd relief. You know it'll all

come back again, but for the moment you're conscious of peace. It's a marvellous feeling."

Zara wondered if her description were apposite. It was not peace she felt, but a curious emptiness, as if she had suddenly given birth to the sorrow she had so long carried within her. Now it was a separate presence, close beside her, but the place where it had lain, nourished by the strength of her body, was void and thoroughly antiseptic.

Zara smiled. She wondered when she would begin to feel with more than those nerves and muscles which responded, automatically, to the exhilaration of the spring. The leaves were out in the Bois. The chestnuts of the Champs Elysées were loaded with fat, pink tappers. Her body responded with a curious lightening of gravity. It was as if her feet left the earth more readily and were longer coming back to it. Her mind was eager for strong meat. She bought the newest philosophies in the arcade of the Rue de Rivoli and discussed with Robert the attempt of a German-American to co-ordinate Science and Faith. But she was in no mood for compromise. Her limbs were untiring, her brain active, and her heart in that swept and garnished condition liable to attract seven devils.

The Hungarian misinterpreted her smile. He took away her cigarette and pulled her up on to the couch. His arms were gentle and while he kissed her, murmuring incomprehensible endearments, her acquiescence was like something heavy wound about her limbs. But his hands wandered to her breast. She was conscious of the demand of his body and suddenly

her own revolted. His touch became unendurable and she tore herself away.

The man stammered his surprise and Zara, reft of dignity, her sense of fitness in shreds, searched blindly for the various attributes of self-possession. Her hat was crushed out of shape. A shoe had been kicked under the sofa. Smoothing herself with speech and quick, instinctive touches, Zara tried to explain. "I ought never to have come. I am so sorry."

The Hungarian thought she was playing a part. He had known women who sought thus to increase the value of their surrender. He held her with as much force as his slenderness permitted and Zara, conscious of the absurdity of the situation, endured his kisses.

"Why are you so cold? What have I done?" asked the man, holding braced steel instead of flesh.

"It's not your fault," said Zara. "I'm terribly sorry. I didn't know—"

All she wanted was to get out of the house and she achieved it at last, breathless and acutely aware of her deficiencies. It was unpardonable, what she had done. On the doorstep, she met the eyes of the Hungarian. They were puzzled and distressed for he didn't know what had happened. Zara's discomfort increased.

"Some day, please, let me explain and do forgive me," she said, the words ill-fitting, because she had no time to shape them properly. She must get away.

She walked the whole way from the Parc Monceau to the Rue de Sûrennes, where, a stone's throw from the Embassy, Robert had his flat. The tramp brought the blood to her cheeks, but it could not exorcise a hu-

miliating memory. For the first time in her life she felt cheap.

"I'm a prig," she told herself. "It's ridiculous. I shall never be able to face the man. What can I say to him?"

Where the Champs Elysées erupt into the splendour of the Concorde, children were playing in the charge of starched nurses. Zara sat on a bench beside a Breton in ribboned cap and streamers. She must think things out. A radical change was in process and she must keep pace with it. But at the end of an hour, during which overdressed mites in pink and blue floated across her consciousness like balloons in a gale, she was no nearer understanding her sudden austerity than when it had wrenched her out of the arms of an accepted lover.

Certainly she had no such feelings for the Hungarian as she had once—above a field of mustard—asserted necessary to the relationship she contemplated, but she liked him and they had much in common. Both were illogically sensitive. Both fought their apprehensions in the privacy of littered minds. In each of them, there was a self which stood aside and watched the others acting. The Hungarian's eyes were haunted with the ambitions he would never achieve. "Nem, nem soha," (never will we accept) was written across his spirits as across the post-war boundaries of his shrunken country. Zara, remembering his mouth which was bitter-sweet with rejection as well as acceptance, knew him attractive, knew him of the same order as herself and also knew that she had hurt him. But she could not help it.

## CHAPTER XXXI

Once or twice, in the weeks that followed, Zara contemplated confiding in Robert. She had come to the point where she wanted to talk. A brother was not, perhaps, the most suitable recipient of such conclusions as she had reached, but Robert no longer represented the Family. He was in process of Latinisation.

William brought his wife from Paris for the conventional modern honeymoon and the second Secretary entertained the newly-married couple as if they were distinguished foreigners. His sister-in-law thought him charming. She hoped he would be an Ambassador.

"I take it Zara's getting over it," said William, becoming confidential about three A.M. Robert was discreet. Privately, he considered that a new Zara might evolve, who would have nothing "to get over," but then he had never had more than a passing acquaintanceship with the old one. He did not know his sister previous to the moment when, in blazing red, she had walked into his flat a fortnight after Christopher's funeral and talked about the plays she wanted to see. That gesture he could appreciate and admire, but he knew nothing of the ruins from whose apex it had been made.

"One cannot say," he temporised. "She has a considerable success over here."

"Time she went home," said William, knocking out

his pipe. It occurred to him suddenly that his wife might be waiting for him.

Zara returned to England before the summer was out. There had been a telegram announcing a seizure. Her mother was seriously ill. Post-haste, both daughters hurried to Buckingham Gate, but Mrs. Wincombe gave no trouble at all. It would have shocked her sense of duty. She lay neatly and tidily in bed for several weeks. Then she got up again and her Family forgot that anything had ever been the matter with her.

Zara, more perspicacious than the others, stayed on in Buckingham Gate. All houses, were much the same to her. She no longer depended on her surroundings.

"After all, one can talk just as well in a station waiting-room as in your magnificently period apartments," she told Jane, who liked possessions. They were the milestones which enumerated her successes. Jane was sincere. It was not her fault that her convictions were necessarily limited by the materialism she had found so satisfactory.

Her car was waiting outside. "I wish you'd come with me," she said. "Mother's much better without us. I think we rather worry her—we're questions to which she doesn't know the answer."

She thought Zara immensely improved after her months in Paris. It would be fun now to talk to her and that hat was admirable.

"Glad you approve," said Zara, answering the unspoken thought.

Her sister smiled. "I always admire you," she said, "but I've consistently disapproved of you."

"It's time you changed."

Jane, very sure of herself and of the combinations which constitute expediency, retorted, "I shall—when you re-marry."

Sitting on the arm of a sofa, a cigarette-case in her hand, she watched the effect of her words. It was disappointing.

Zara, with an arm crooked behind her head, was smoking and staring at the ceiling.

"You didn't particularly approve of my last attempt," she said.

"You wouldn't do it again?"

"You're wrong. I should do it every time."

"Even if you could foresee all that has happened?"

Zara nodded. "Of course."

She never talked about Christopher-Carlyon, for she felt that, by doing so, she would be sharing a private possession. She wanted to keep Christopher for herself. The fact that between them the physical tie had been slight, made it easier for her to remember the least and, therefore, the most poignant things about him, but they were for her only. So she asked, "Who d'you want me to marry now? Not the Family Butler?"

Jane, aware of trespass, contented herself with remarking, "I should say you'd got beyond meringues. Well, come down for the week-end anyway."

"I can't. I am going to sit at the feet of Israel."

Jane had the audacity to laugh.

A couple of days later, Zara was staying in a large white house, where life flowed out on to wide porches as if there were too much of it to be confined by in-

elastic walls. It was certainly a vast party and its components were all connected. Here was a Family entrenched within its own interests. It had no need of strangers. It was self-sufficient, united by the same purpose and the same trend of thought. Its stability had grown with the centuries, so that Zara told her host, "I feel like an insect, blown on to the surface of a globe."

"Are we as comprehensive as all that?"

"Yes," said Zara, looking down the long table where everyone was talking with spontaneous enjoyment, because he or she had a lot to say and no doubt at all about the interest it would arouse. There were several young married couples but the women, in spite of their lip-salve and the latest thing in jewels had an air of being part of a permanent system. They had children just as they had parents.

"Are there no rebels?" asked Zara.

"A few perhaps, but they're negligible. You see, however much you may rebel against the presentation of a fact, you cannot alter the fact itself," suggested the Jew.

"Meaning?"

The man smiled at her over his glass. "The continuity to which you so strongly object."

The dinner was unobtrusively perfect. There were no blank spaces in the conversation. All knew each other very well and, apparently, liked what they knew. In another room, lined with equally fine panelling and hung with a few world-famous pictures, Zara found herself involved in the usual modern conversation. But there was something distinctive about the comment

and criticism which was tossed from sister to cousin and back again equally forcefully by an aunt or by the Matriarch herself. It took Zara some time to realise that here there was no obvious gap between one generation and another. The young women carried on what their elders had begun. They might modify or develop it, but the general principles were the same. There was no breaking away from established tradition to raise a succession of new standards each brittle as the opinions which evolved it. A certain deference was paid to age, which, in consequence, had no need to excuse itself by talking of "my young days."

There was something else. A novel which had been privately printed was being discussed in vigorous terms. "Why not study the farmyard? You'd learn much more in ten minutes," said a dark young woman who had the dignity of a princess in a Persian fairy-tale.

Zara was puzzled. They talked of the problem which incited most of her contemporaries to reminiscence as if it had been a widely advertised murder case. It could not possibly affect them. Suddenly Zara realised that among these women chastity was taken for granted. They did not even regard it as a necessary evil. It was just a fact.

Life must be very simple, thought Zara, if it were all hung about with facts. Personally, she had always been able to turn them inside out and the linings looked quite different. Only time was intransigent. She could do nothing with it, so she was afraid of it.

The Matriarch was sitting in a high-backed chair. She wore a satin dress the colour of her hair. Obviously, she had made no concessions to time or to

anything else. It must be nice to be able to rely on age instead of humouring it.

Zara found herself on the wide verandah, in a basket chair heaped with cushions, and the Jew sat beside her. The end of his cigar glowed at regular intervals. The night was very still and the scent of roses lay heaped upon the heavy air. Perhaps there was going to be a thunderstorm.

Zara was reminded of a night in the smallest British Protectorate. Suddenly she began to tell her companion about it. "How can one resist? One isn't meant to resist," she repeated as if her premises were in dispute.

But the Jew was silent. He was thinking of the place he had intended for Zara. There were a dozen children in his house, but he had none.

"I don't understand," said the woman beside him and she went on talking, of the Cambridge Blue and, last of all, of the Hungarian.

While he listened, the Jew made a heap of many small objects on the table beside him. He wondered if he could as easily pile up and discard the hopes of a decade. He wanted Zara. The voice ceased its destruction and, with the scent and the stillness of the night like the ache of an intolerable discord, he remembered that he wanted to help her.

"What have I done?" concluded Zara.

"You've been amazingly honest."

In his sorrow the man asked himself if, after all, honesty were not enough. It was so much more than the majority could command. But he had made no idols. For him there was but one God.

"You've certainly got through a good deal," he said, and Zara felt as if she were a child who had broken objects of value to its elders. She turned to him with what was almost a cry.

"I don't know what I've done. I'm no longer certain of anything. Christopher knew what he wanted. He never got it, but he never had the slightest doubt that it existed. Living with him was like having a torch. I didn't always want to use it. It showed up the wrong things."

Zara hesitated. The impetus of her thought was broken. She leaned over the arm of her chair and stared at the Jew.

"You ought to be able to help me," she said. "Have you ever, in all your life, had one moment of uncertainty?"

The man laughed and it was a relief to both of them. "Lots," he said, but he didn't tell her that he had just experienced the worst.

"The means are always a source of perplexity, but it doesn't matter if one is sure of the end," he continued, since Zara expected some such remark. After all, there was a great deal he could do for her.

"I suspect you of a conscience," said the woman in the basket chair. "A sort of spiritual passbook which can be made up at any time. It must be so nice to know whether the balance is credited or debit."

"Don't you deal in conscience?" asked the Jew, unnecessarily.

"I haven't got one myself, but I have a sense of responsibility. Are they, by chance, the same?"

"No," said the Jew.

"What's the difference?"

"I should say one represents duty towards God and the other duty towards man."

Zara sighed. It was hopeless talking to a man who spoke thus familiarly of God.

She re-arranged the cushions and searched for her cigarette case. The Jew retrieved it for her.

"You smoke too much," he said.

"I do everything too much and the result is chaos," answered a weary voice, for Zara was beginning to see herself isolated in the middle of the destruction she had wrought. There was no longer any necessity for revolt. The idols were all smashed, but it was necessary to deal with the consequences of such victories. She had made a terrific indictment and when she examined the subsequent solution, she found it wanting. She had gone forth to destroy "Cæsar, Mammon, George F. Babbitt and Mrs. Grundy," with the result that when her energy was no longer focussed by indignation, she found herself a sceptic. She was not unlike the reformers who, according to Mr. Canby, "at the age of seven, saw through their parents. At fourteen they saw through education. At eighteen they saw through morality, at twenty they lost respect for their home towns, and at twenty-one they discovered that the social system was ridiculous." Fortunately, perhaps, Zara had not yet seen through herself.

That night, she talked of Christopher-Carlyon. "It was all so useless," she said. "I couldn't even make him happy and I did try. That was an abiding purpose and it came to pieces in my hand." Zara tried to evade

the implication of her words by twisting them towards an empty humour, but she was stung by the Jew's simplicity.

Happiness," he mused. "We are all obsessed by it. I wonder if it is essential." And Zara felt as if happiness were a plaster which she wanted to apply forcibly to an unprotected Christopher.

"You are a most upsetting person," she said with irritation.

That night they talked for a long time, but the remainder of the week-end was full of people. The Jew was very busy teaching his sister's children to play tennis. He made Zara help and everybody else included her in a variety of conversations, so that she had no occasion to be alone with her host. It was a perplexing week-end. Perhaps she had expected too much. On her way back to London, Zara planned other occasions on which there would be no diversions, and then she began to wonder, for it was the first time that she had, consciously, adjusted herself to a future.

Mrs. Wincombe was in the drawing-room. She looked at her daughter with a dumb expectation which was singularly irritating. Zara thought of the Matriarch with her colourless hair and skin and her arrogant eyes which had never bargained with expediency. They had yielded nothing but the creases accentuating their depth.

"It's an interesting household," she said, "Very patriarchal. None of them have much life of their own. They are extraordinarily inter-dependent and it doesn't seem to worry them a bit."

She thought of the Jew who, as the eldest son of

an eldest son, accepted unlimited responsibility for branches so distant that they would long ago have been lopped off the average family tree.

"It *is* a curious life," she repeated, but she found she could not criticise its destruction. "I should hate to have everything arranged for me," she added.

"Oh no, my dear," returned Mrs. Wincombe. "It would be delightful. I do hate sums and your father is so fond of them. I always think business is best left to men. They understand it so well."

Zara sat on the floor beside her mother. She felt comparatively friendly and she exaggerated her affection for the benefit of the tired woman, who was talking about John Wincombe as if a husband were not, necessarily, a man.

"I hate to think of you alone," said Mrs. Wincombe. "You ought to have someone to look after you."

Her daughter turned and their eyes met. There was a measure of understanding in the glance.

"Darling Mother," said Zara and to satisfy Mrs. Wincombe, she described in detail the house-party at which she had assisted. "It was exceptionally friendly, with no cross currents of criticism, and everyone gave the impression of being fully occupied and interested in all sorts of different things. Jews are very receptive. They all know an awful lot and they are sort of intellectually—oh, I don't know—is alert the word? In any case, I felt an empty-headed fool."

"Nonsense," said Mrs. Wincombe. She was sure the Jew had not thought so. "He is such a good

man," she reflected without troubling about the context. Zara first stared and then laughed at her.

It was a few days later that she met the Cambridge Blue at a very small cocktail party at which Zara was the only woman. He seemed to her longer than ever and she asked him the reason.

"Sky-scraping," he said. "I've been in America for a couple of months. Didn't you get my letters? They were my only relief, save always the joke of prohibition."

"I did get some deletions from Baedeker, mixed with bath salts."

The Cambridge Blue grinned. He had gained assurance. "I should have said culture mixed with ice-cream soda and synthetic gin," he corrected. "There is no such thing as correspondence in America, unless it's a course."

Together they examined the water-colours and congratulated the artist who was the the objective of the cocktail party.

"I'll give you a lift," said Zara and they went off in a car which Jane had lent to Mrs. Wincombe.

"I still get that thrill," said the man, taking her hand, and he leaned over her to kiss the side of her neck. "For the Lord's sake, marry me and have done with it."

"Certainly not," said Zara, pulling herself away.

"Why not? I'd make a tolerable husband."

"I'm sure you would, but that's the last thing I want."

"What do you want? Children? I'd like a couple of boys."

Zara was indignant. She could have no son but Christopher's. It was intolerable to think of anyone else as the father of Timothy-Anne. Then, in the full spate of her rejection, she thought of the large, white house, which was so particularly suited to children. The words trickled where they should have been a tide. Humorously, she looked at the man beside her. His lean face was serious. So he wanted to marry her and begin all over again. Why this passion for repetition?

"What would be the good of our marrying? It would be stale. We've done everything that it occurred to us to do and the rest's beyond us."

"Is there anything else except parenthood?"

Zara felt immeasurably superior.

"A universe," she said.

"But look here, you'll have to marry someone."

"Why?"

The Cambridge Blue thought she was in a difficult temper, but she looked extremely attractive in a hat which freed her eyebrows. He kissed the one nearest him and her lashes tickled his chin. In a moment, they were laughing like school-children.

"America has evidently cured your inhibition," said Zara.

"You're not comparing this ultimate luxury to a taxi, are you?" retorted the man and, conscious of the change in her mood, he added, "This is the sort of moment when you could marry me."

"But it wouldn't last. We've no illusions and they're essential to marriage."

"Very stuffy," said the Cambridge Blue.

"Not at all. We've knocked so many holes in the house where you would have us live, that the first storm would bring it down altogether."

"That's not bad," said the Cambridge Blue. He appreciated Zara's intelligence.

August closed the shutters of one-hundred and seven Buckingham Gate. Mrs. Wincombe was going to subside into the comfort of John's house in Sussex. Mr. Wincombe was going to endure it because Jane had arranged with Providence that her second child should be a daughter, and he liked the mite for whose charm he felt no responsibility. Zara was due at Widelands, from which its châtelaine wrote: "You must have had an interesting time in Paris, but we've all missed you. I'd no idea you were so necessary, and it's certainly bad for you to know it. I want an hour on clothes. Are you in the secret of next autumn? How I hate these long dresses. We've lost our ankles and our common sense. Everybody has become a peer, even our Cabinet-Minister—he says it's exchanging a music-hall for a mausoleum, or perhaps I said it. In any case, do hurry down here and stay put. I've such a lot to talk about—it'll take several weeks."

A pleased Zara walked down Piccadilly which looked as if it were contemplating face-cream and curlers. It needed a good rest and something done to its face.

As she passed the Ritz, meditating on the individual quality of the Interesting Woman's dispensations, a man raised his hat unnoticed. He hesitated, continued for a few paces in the opposite direction, glanced over his shoulder and then, resolutely, pursued her. It was the Jew.

"It is indicated that you should lunch with me," he said.

Zara agreed and they went to the nearest grill-room. An expectant waiter assigned them the corner table, where ten years ago, they had discussed the possibility of marriage. It happened that they ordered much the same food.

"A cocktail?" queried the Jew and his eyes were amused.

Zara nodded. "In honour of an anniversary," she said. "D'you realise how long we-ve known each other?"

Their glances met with the satisfaction of long-established intimacy and unconsciously they took stock.

The man's skin had darkened, so that by contrast his eyes were like wet amber. They were luminous and steadfast. His body had thickened, but it was controlled by carefully-cultivated muscle. The powerful head was set a little forward so that it had an air of insistent domination. The mouth was austere. It had no use for those new middle ways, on which flounder the experimentalists in search of consistency.

And Zara? The man thought he had never seen anyone so unmarked by experience. With the exception of the lines between her nostrils and the corners of her bewildering mouth, there was no sign of conflict. In the strong sunlight, she looked young and irrepressibly healthy.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked.

"Your mouth," retorted the Jew, but his voice was cool.

"Is it still a public menace?"

"I have been told so."

For a while they wandered in the insidious ways of "Do you remember—" and "If it had been different—" and a row of small brown coffee-pots bore witness to the libations with which they stimulated retrospection.

"It's been great fun knowing you," commented Zara, "or should I say 'having you know me?'—for you're the only person who does."

The Jew regarded her with grave and kindly eyes. They were uncomfortably faithful, so that on a sudden impulse Zara asked, "Why didn't you insist on marrying me?"

"You wanted freedom," said the man.

Silence settled over the table till Zara broke it sharply. "I've had enough of it," she said without bitterness, for in the Jew there was some quality which sweetened disjointed memories with a sense of gain.

A waiter offered liqueurs. The Jew suggested Cointreau and Zara refused.

"Further stimulus would be dangerous," she said, and she was surprised when her host requested his bill. She had expected that he would ask her to marry him. In fact, she had taken it for granted. But he did not.

FINIS

THIS BOOK IS THE PROPERTY OF
THE SANFORD LIBRARY,
CLEVELAND, OHIO